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ABSTRACT

Drawing from a compelling educational initiative that introduced developmentally appropriate teaching techniques from the United States to the well-established early childhood programs in Europe and the former Soviet Union, this book contends that there are subtle, yet effective, teaching techniques that encourage choice individualism, creativity, equality, respect for differences, and appreciation of individuals' needs while maintaining the balance for the greater good of the group. The book offers clear and specific guidance, examples, methods, and language to help prepare young citizens to flourish in the culture of democracy. Topics addressed include opportunity and self-initiative, appreciation of differences and similarities, and family culture. The chapters of the book are: (1) "Education and Democracy"; (2) The Child-Centered Classroom"; (3) "Creation of a Plan for the Child-Centered Classroom"; (4) "Equality"; (5) "Skills, Talents, and Creativity"; (6) "Encouragement of Positive Behavior"; (7) "Development of Healthy Habits"; (8) "Communication with Children, Parents, and Others"; (9) "Family and Community Involvement"; and (10) "The Transition to Primary School." Each of the chapters includes a "parent page" with suggestions for supporting the particular democratic ideal of the chapter. Contains 14 references. (HTH)

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EDUCATION AND THE CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY: EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTICE

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FOREWORD BY PAM COUGHLIN & LIZ LORANT
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EDUCATION AND THE CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY: EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTICE

Kirsten A. Hansen, Roxane K. Kaufmann, and Steffen Saifer

Foreword by Pam Coughlin and Liz Lorant
Preface by Václav Havel

To the children and families of Central and Eastern Europe who have been pioneers in embracing democratic education.

The Soros Foundations/Open Society Institute is a network of foundations, programs, and institutions established and supported by philanthropist George Soros to foster the development of Open Societies around the world, particularly in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. To this end the Soros Foundation cooperates with Children's Resources International to develop and implement the project called Step by Step: A Program for Children and Families.

CRI, a nonprofit organization located in Washington, D.C., promotes the implementation of sound educational practices developed in the United States while maintaining the cultural traditions of the nineteen participating countries.

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PREFACE

The most basic sphere of concern is schooling. Everything else depends on that.

What will our schools be like? I think that in ten years they should be fully reformed and consolidated. The point, understandably, is not just the reconstruction of school buildings or the supply of computers and new textbooks. The most important thing is a new concept of education. At all levels, schools must cultivate a spirit of free and independent thinking in the students. Schools will have to be humanized, both in the sense that their basic component must be the human personalities of the teachers, creating around themselves a "force field" of inspiration and example, and in the sense that technical and other specialized education will be balanced by a general education in the humanities.

The role of the schools is not to create "idiot-specialists" to fill the special needs of different sectors of the national economy, but to develop the individual capabilities of the students in a purposeful way, and to send out into life thoughtful people capable of thinking about the wider social, historical, and philosophical implications of their specialities. All those who today seriously and deeply concern themselves with scientific disciplines—from chemistry or mathematics, all the way to zoo technology—must somehow be touched by basic human questions such as the meaning of our being, the structure of space and time, the order of the universe, and the position of human existence in it. The schools must also lead young people to become self-confident, participating citizens; if everyone doesn't take an interest in politics, it will become the domain of those least suited to it.

—VÁCLAV HAVEL
Summer Meditations

FOREWORD

This book is an outgrowth of the work of visionary educators and families in the emerging democracies of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The book is one component of a pioneering process to redefine education systems, undertaken in nineteen countries by the Open Society Institute and Children's Resources International. As Václav Havel stated in the preface, ". . . schools must cultivate a spirit of free independent thinking."

In 1994 George Soros took a leap of faith by dedicating substantial resources of his Open Society Institute to an early childhood education project that we believed would ultimately lead to a new participatory citizenry beginning with the youngest members of society, its children. The belief was that even very young children can make effective choices, understand the consequences of their actions, and respect the different styles of their fellow students under the guidance of a teacher. Moreover, we wanted to draw parents into the process by involving them for the first time in the education of their children.

To realize these goals, we developed a methodology for teaching children three to five years old. The methodology includes developmentally appropriate teaching techniques from the United States and introduced these to the well-established system of early care and education in the countries that would implement the program. The methodology calls for the arrangement of the classroom environment into activity centers. These centers necessitate active choice, participatory learning through play and discovery, and the negotiation of learning opportunities with other children. The teacher's role becomes that of a facilitator. The methodology also calls for teaching assistants in the classroom, lowering the adult-

child ratio, thereby permitting individualized teaching. Finally, the methodology calls for a room dedicated to parent activities at each school, the active involvement of parents in classrooms and in the decision making process of the schools through parent advisory committees.

Initially, we assumed that there would be a small demonstration model at one site in one country. However, we quickly learned that our colleagues in these countries enthusiastically welcomed new methods to meet their academic standards. Fifteen countries actively sought the program, which has come to be known as Step by Step. In the first year, the program was operational in 250 classrooms, burgeoning in the second year to more than 1500 classrooms serving over 37,500 children and families. The project grew not only in participation, but in scope. We subsequently developed a complementary program and for children in primary grades and a higher education initiative for pedagogic faculties.

The Open Society Institute in each operating country identified its project team, a country director, and master teacher trainer, to implement the methodology. From the onset, we knew that the training of the country teams would be critical to the success of the program. We also knew that skills would be acquired over time and sensed that this process would flourish if the European educators were paired with American trainers. Thus, we linked each country team with two American trainers for ongoing training and assistance.

At the inaugural training, which brought together the country teams and American trainers, we were asked, "How do you teach democracy?" We were surprised by the question and found it hard to answer concisely and concretely. However, the process of implementing the Step by Step program and working closely with teachers and families in emerging democracies taught us that a child-centered approach to teaching is a powerful way to develop active citizens in open societies. In hindsight, we recognize that our methodology was premised upon democratic assumptions. Consequently, it became

important to clarify how child-rearing practices, such as daily interactions, communication, and the opportunity to make choices promote democracy.

This book provides a framework for understanding the relationship between early childhood education and the capacity to function effectively in a democracy. It offers clear and specific guidance, examples, methods, and language to help prepare young citizens to grow within a culture of democracy.

The authors, noted experts in early childhood education, drew upon their experience as developers of the Step by Step methodology and as trainers in the program. We must underscore the invaluable contribution that educators from Central and Eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union made to this endeavor. Their intellectual rigor, dedication, and sacrifice continually inspire and renew us. We are grateful to them for questioning us.

Pam Coughlin
Children's Resources International

Liz Lorant
Open Society Institute

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We believe that the culture of democracy is taught and modeled day-by-day. By starting this process with the youngest citizens, the children, the principles of open societies are instilled in the next generation. Child-centered classrooms promote democratic principles and inspire life-long learners who are able to succeed in open societies.

Because of the commitment of Mr. George Soros and the Open Society Institute, thousands of young children, their families, and teachers have joined us at Children's Resources International, Inc. (CRI) in an effort to create an educational experience that promotes democratic thinking and action.

This book would not have been possible without the careful review and thoughtful additions made by our colleagues who are heading the teams in the Step by Step program in nineteen countries: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. This partnership informs our writing and enhances our lives.

Liz Lorant, from the Open Society Institute, provided the impetus and guidance for this book. In a discussion with European educators, Liz said, "It is so important for children to develop with a sense of personal freedom. All children must learn to make choices and decisions for themselves." We hope that this book helps make that challenge a reality.

Another advocate and Soros partner is Sarah Klaus. Her energy and devotion to the project supported us with guidance and a sense of direction. We are truly fortunate to be working so closely with both Liz and Sarah.

The CRI executive team always has time for brainstorming, constructive feedback, and cathartic laughter. Pam Coughlin, Julie Empson, Kate Walsh, and Carolyn Rutsch have read and critiqued the document, providing their thoughtful insights. We thank them for their efforts.

We thank the United States trainers who contributed photographs and examples of classroom practices that helped us write realistic situations.

Madeleine Will brings more than her knowledge of proper English to the task of editing this document. Her experience working with parents and professionals in Central and Eastern Europe makes her sensitive to the cultural nuances necessary in a book of this kind. We are so appreciative of her skill and her caring.

Appreciation goes to Jean Iker for her creative assistance and the Crosby Group for the cover design.

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CHAPTER 1

EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY

This book offers all individuals interested in education the tools of attitude, behavior, and instructional strategy to prepare young children to live in a new culture, a culture of open, democratic societies. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the opportunities are increasingly great to develop and expand the culture of democracy—where the individual and the society are valued in equal measure; where justice and equality, individual liberty, and the welfare of society are valued in equal measure; where the potential of the individual and the natural bounty of the earth are developed and conserved in equal measure.

Democracy in its purest form—complete shared rule and total equality of rights and opportunities is an ideal that is unattainable. But there is little in life that is more worth the struggle and the attempt to achieve.

Educators and parents have a vital role to play in this endeavor. Schools, especially those for young children, families, and communities, all shape the lives of citizens in creating ways that enhance or reduce their capacity to function in democracy and to live their lives according to democratic ideals. This occurs consciously and unconsciously. But nevertheless, by carefully and purposefully providing children with the knowledge and skills they require to function in a democracy as adults, educators, and parents mold the democratic society of the future.

The purpose of this book is to assist and support educators, parents, and others in that task. Not only is the task it-

self difficult to implement, but those who undertake it must cope with the turmoil produced by change. In many cases, the idea of preparing children to function in a democratic culture runs counter to lifelong training and expectations. Philosophy, policy, and custom may contradict it; history and culture may reject it.

But this book does more than offer a new educational philosophy. It provides clear and specific guidance, examples, methods, even language to help those persons involved and interested in the education of young children. At the beginning of each chapter a fictional situation illustrates how behavior and attitudes create barriers to democratic culture. Each chapter describes how democratic practices might have been used in the fictional situation. The book also provides many ideas, suggestions, and examples of ways to nurture democratic values.

The authors offer only thorough and relevant information, but obviously, it is difficult to produce one work which achieves complete relevancy for the many individuals, families, communities, and religious, racial, and ethnic cultures of Central and Eastern Europe. Many of the ideas presented in the following pages will require modification to fit particular circumstances and contexts. Nevertheless, the authors have tried to factor in the distinct character of cultural traditions in each country when they advocate a particular course of action, respecting customs and ethical norms while promoting democratic principles and practices.

This book contains ten chapters. Each chapter ends with a Parent Page. These pages provide a review of the most important concepts in the chapter. They also offer parents ideas on how to implement the chapter ideas at home. The pages can be copied and distributed to parents, printed in newsletters, placed on the parent bulletin board, and used in parent meetings.

This book complements the Step by Step methodologies. These volumes were developed by Children's Resources Inter-

national, Inc. in collaboration with the Open Society Institute. Each work supports and enhances the other. In some cases, this book gives a theoretical framework for curriculum practices and, in other cases, gives specific strategies that are dealt with more theoretically in the methodologies.

What does it mean to educate children for democracy? The following guiding principles provide a partial answer to that question. All the strategies and techniques discussed later in the book are developed from these guiding principles. They form the foundation upon which the educational house is built. In kindergartens, children should experience democracy and begin to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to function effectively as citizens in a democratic society. The classroom is a microcosm of the larger community.

Dr. Carol Seefeldt, who has written extensively on this concept, indicates:

> Through every experience young children learn that they are worthy, valued, and respected. They know that their individual needs and wants will be met and that their rights will be protected. At the same time, they are learning to expand their concerns and give up some of their egocentrism for the good of others and the group. As members of a democratic community, children develop a sense of shared concern, recognizing that their interests overlap with the interests of others and that their welfare is inextricably entwined with the welfare of others (Seefeldt and Barbour, 1994, p. 584).

Principles and Guidance

Opportunity and Self-Initiative

In open, democratic societies, opportunities abound for people to better themselves, their families, and society. Op-

portunity itself is a hallmark of democracy, but it alone does not guarantee it. Opportunity must be balanced with compassion, so that it does not result in mere personal advantage at the expense of others or the common good. Taking advantage of opportunities requires self-initiative as they are seldom freely offered or easily found. Self-initiative is then another closely related principle of democracy. This is the willingness to commit time and energy, for little or no short-term gain, to pursue opportunities for oneself and others.

In kindergartens, teachers can both model this behavior and create an environment to generate opportunity for self-initiative. When children are given choices of a variety of activities in which to participate, they are given opportunities. When children are helped to identify and engage in an activity, they are shown the importance of self-initiative. The satisfaction of selecting an activity, and learning or creating something as a result, is an expression of the values of self-initiative and opportunity.

Self-Efficacy and Empowerment

Self-efficacy is the ability to affect the world, to get one's needs met in a positive way, and to understand how to access internal and external resources. One of the primary goals of education should be to develop human beings with this capacity. This is possible only in environments where children interact with others and practice negotiation and problem-solving, where teachers help children reflect on their actions, and where teachers facilitate children's learning in their areas of interest rather than direct their learning.

In addition, teachers set up environments and interact with children to empower them so they can become self-efficacious. Empowerment is maximized when children have many opportunities to take leadership roles, make decisions that affect them and others, make choices effectively, and take responsibility—in ways appropriate for their ages and ability levels.

Positive behavior is best promoted when values are inter-

nalized rather than externally imposed through threat of authority or promise of reward. Dr. Seefeldt emphasizes, "Discipline is firm and consistent, but does not revolve around force, coercion, or threat. [Because many young children] believe that rules come from authority and that being good means following orders, children need to participate in setting and following rules and begin the long process of being able to separate intent from action" (Seefeldt and Barbour, 1994, p. 584).

Shared Control

Each group and family in a democracy is unique because its culture is developed through the mutual construction and development of rules, values, and practices. According to Dr. Seefeldt, "Teachers do not give orders and expect children to follow their directions blindly. Rather than emphasizing the task or skill to be learned, teachers focus on how children are feeling, reacting, and interacting with one another" (Seefeldt and Barbour, 1994, p. 584). The curriculum and classroom activities are developed jointly by children and adults based on children's expressed needs, strengths and interests, and the teacher's skill of analyzing these criteria.

Freedom of Thought and Speech

This is the core freedom of an open society and usually the first thing to disappear as societies begin to close. However, it must be emphasized that modern authoritarian regimes must co-exist with computers, the Internet, Fax, copy machines, and other technological means which provide unprecedented opportunities for freedom of thought and speech to flourish. For young children, access to technology is less important than the direct, firsthand experience of exercising free will and thought often and regularly. In kindergartens,

> children are expected to have opinions and express them. This expectation governs every area of the curriculum. Instead of giving children pre-drawn

> pictures to color or only craft activities for art, children are asked to express their own ideas, thoughts, and feelings in drawings, paintings or their constructions. For literacy activities, they are asked to discuss, express, and write (at whatever level they can) what they know and feel. They are given choices about how they will learn math, science, and other academic skills (Seefeldt and Barbour, 1994, p. 584).

Power Versus Respect

In part, teachers share control because this mirrors the values and practices of the participatory system of the adult citizenry, where no single individual or small group maintains too much power over the larger group. Teachers also make sure that a child or small group of children does not exert too much power over other children. Respect for every person is modeled and promoted. Not everyone has to like each other, but everyone has to respect each other's humanity, dignity, and basic rights. Respectful words are used in all interactions, even if they are angry and confrontational. The impact of one's actions on others is duly considered. Although most young children cannot weigh considerations well or easily because their self-control is developing, teachers can help children learn to respect others.

Appreciation of Differences and Similarities

Child-centered classrooms and open societies recognize that each individual is unique and has a valuable contribution to make. Likewise, groups of individuals who share the same culture make an important contribution to the whole community. As more societies have become increasingly pluralistic, an unfortunate effect of this pluralism has been increasing ethnic entrenchment and division. In order to promote a more positive response to ethnic and cultural diversity—one of understanding and celebration—teachers and parents can

instill compassion toward others and an appreciation of differences. This goes beyond the idea of merely creating "equal opportunities" for all regardless of race, religion, disability, or gender. It requires adults to engage in an active process of celebrating the differences and similarities among people and seizing the opportunities that differences provide to promote understanding among children. A child with a severe physical disability makes it possible for children without physical disabilities in the class to look beyond superficial differences, to experience the rewards which come from helping someone in need, and to learn acceptance and patience.

Children and Academics

Many teachers and parents are concerned that a child-centered classroom will not provide the structure needed for rigorous, intensive, and specific learning to take place. In the United States research has shown the opposite to be true. Perhaps because learning and ability are so closely tied to emotions and to feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment, more child-centered preschool classrooms produce children whose academic abilities are superior to the abilities of children who attend more traditional classrooms. These differences persist for many years after preschool (Marcon, 1992; Marcon, 1990; Miller and Bizzell, 1984). Researchers have also found that as adults, children who attended more democratic preschools have higher employment rates, commit less crime, and are generally more caring and responsible than those who attend more traditional preschools (Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart, 1993). The more child-centered the classroom, the better the outcomes for children in both social and academic domains.

In spite of over two hundred years of democracy in the United States, classroom practices vary dramatically according to the philosophies and attitudes of particular educational leaders and teachers. Although almost no educator in the United States would admit to maintaining an authoritarian

classroom, many such classrooms do exist because of misguided ideas on how to best assure that children learn or because obedience is valued more than self-efficacy. Unfortunately, many educators still believe that acquiring basic facts and learning obedience to authority are the central purposes of education as opposed to the empowerment of individuals and the internalization of controls. Also, in the United States, the individual right of p[illegible]nts to educate their children in any manner they see fit is [illegible] valued principle of democracy. Recent studies in the United States comparing child-centered programs to traditional programs—similar to those in Central and Eastern Europe—support the efficacy of this methodology.

Additionally, in child-centered classrooms children are not the passive recipients of knowledge and skills. Because a teacher gives a lesson does not necessarily mean a child learns. In active classrooms teachers provide many, many opportunities for children to practice and apply skills and knowledge in a variety of ways, across many situations. The focus in child-centered classrooms is on teaching for understanding and meaning rather than simply for rote learning. As children are encouraged to follow their interests and needs, teachers help children develop the specific abilities required to pursue those interests and meet those needs as fully and deeply as each child can. This assures that interest and motivation (two key factors for successful learning diminished in teacher-directed, nondemocratic classrooms) remain high.

The authors do not claim that the United States has the most consistently excellent preschools in the world, but rather that the United States does have extensive experience with excellent preschools that empower children in open, democratic classrooms.

PARENT PAGE

In kindergartens which promote democracy, children are empowered to take initiative, respect and take responsibility for themselves and others, share control, think, and act and speak freely and openly. This occurs because children make decisions about their own learning, follow their interests, and express and act on their needs and feelings.

Child-centered kindergartens can only be successful when they form a close partnership with you, the parents. The kindergarten is responsible for seeking your views and concerns and acting on them. Conversely, you have a responsibility to communicate often and regularly and to get involved.

At home you can help your children develop these skills mentioned above.

- Giving them a range of acceptable choices—which pants to wear, cup to use, or book to read.
- Playing with them and following their lead in play activities.
- Giving them responsibilities appropriate for their age—sorting socks, setting the table, and cooking.

How will your children learn academic skills?

Much research has shown that children who attend child-centered kindergartens where they learn to make good choices and develop self-efficacy do better academically and socially than children who attend more traditional, teacher-directed kindergartens. Teachers teach skills when children are ready and interested through complex and challenging play, games, routines, and engaging activities.

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CHAPTER 2

THE CHILD-CENTERED CLASSROOM

Teacher-Directed Practice

Thirty children are sitting in chairs in a circle. The teacher has a new box of attribute blocks (bright, shiny, plastic circles, squares, rectangles and triangles, large and small, thick and thin). She introduces the names of the shapes to the children and calls upon them to come to her chair and repeat the name of the shape she is holding. The children are very compliant and clap after each child repeats the correct name. After twenty minutes the teacher puts the attribute blocks away on a high shelf out of the reach of the children.

The children in this situation have learned by rote the names of the shapes. They have not manipulated the shapes, compared them to each other, stacked them, sorted them or explored their many properties. Nor did the activity challenge the children to think in greater depth or complexity, or encourage individual responses. By removing the blocks from the children, the teacher precluded any additional learning from the materials. The learning was controlled by the teacher not the children.

A child-centered classroom looks very different. A child-centered classroom is built around two core principles:

- Children create their own knowledge from their experiences and interactions with the world around them.
- Teachers foster children's growth and development best by building on the interests, needs, and strengths of the children.

The classroom is a laboratory where children experiment with roles as explorers, artists, friends, and scientists. Teachers are responsible for transforming the classroom into this kind of a laboratory. They are responsible for organizing materials to encourage creative and ongoing experimentation, discovery, and problem solving by the children.

Teachers respect the ideas of the children and use those ideas to mold the curriculum. Teachers interact with children as they work and play: they model supportive, caring behaviors for children; they observe and listen to children in activity centers; they record and evaluate their observations; and they use their observations in planning and individualizing for children. In an environment where teachers encourage children to pursue their interests, children develop a strong sense of importance and self-initiative.

In one kindergarten classroom, a child named Mia had an older brother, Peter, who recently had obtained a job as a construction worker. She was very proud of her brother and often talked about him to her friends. The teachers decided to call Peter and arrange a visit to the construction site. On the visit to the site the children were given notebooks with paper and pencils to take with them to draw or dictate their observations. They were fascinated by the building process—the machinery, the bricks and other materials, the large hole dug in the ground, the scaffolding, and the caps worn by the workers. The teachers decided to work with the children to create their own construction site back at the kindergarten. They gathered together trucks and wooden scraps to add to the block area. They had several parents build a wood-working table so the children could use real tools such as hammers, nails, and saws. The children who were interested, made yellow paper mache construction hats in the art activity center. The teachers filled the literacy area with books, pictures of buildings, and children's observations about construction. The children's notes and drawings were posted on the walls along with a copy of an architectural plan donated by Peter. Outside, the chil-

dren made mud bricks out of sand, clay, and water, which they dried and used to build a temporary wall. When Peter came to visit the kindergarten construction site, he was amazed by the skills of the young children. He told them that they were very professional and creative in their work. The teacher had noted Mia's enthusiasm for her brother's work and expanded the theme to enrich all the children.

The activity centers are designed to provide a choice of materials for children to use, even when one theme is being explored by most of the children.

In the child-centered classroom children:

- Make choices
- Play actively
- Use open-ended materials
- Work together and care for each other
- Take responsibility

In the child-centered classroom teachers:

- Take responsibility to make the day fun and engaging
- Individualize learning

Teachers also make choices, plan appropriate activities, ask open-ended questions, and facilitate children's learning.

Recent research has shown that informal child-centered education can produce long-term advantages over isolated, skill-focused instruction (Schweinhart, Barnes, and Weikart, 1993). Optimal cognitive and emotional growth occurs when activity centers thematically integrate literacy, mathematical, and scientific learning.

The child-centered classroom is not a laissez-faire program without goals or direction. The daily schedule provides security and predictability. Materials are developmentally appropriate and open-ended. Teachers observe children interacting with peers and classroom materials to identify strengths and needs. Rules help children learn that caring for each other is an integral part of school.

Opportunities for Choice

Making decisions is fundamental to the democratic process. Choosing activities, materials, foods, and clothes helps children practice the decision-making process in safe, structured ways. They learn to take responsibility for their choices and understand the consequences of their actions. The child must ask herself, "If I play with the blocks now, I may miss the cooking activity. Which is more important to me?"

When the teacher asks the children to vote on the name of the new kindergarten rabbit, they learn that they have the power to make something happen as a group. They also learn that the group democratic process may not always support their individual choice.

Making choices requires practice. Effective choice-making should not be confused with intelligence. Rather, it is a learned skill built upon opportunity and practice. Children,

who attend classrooms where choice is built into the learning environment, will weigh the costs and benefits of their choices and make appropriate decisions for themselves. As children practice making choices, they become better at making decisions in a world that increasingly offers more complex options.

The kindergarten schedule allows many opportunities for children to make choices: where to sit in the circle; in which activity center to work; with whom to play on the playground; whether to throw the large or small ball; or whether to make a clay dog.

Child-Centered Practice

The children sit on the floor at morning group time. The teacher shows the children the new box of attribute blocks that has just arrived. She passes several blocks around and asks the children to describe what they notice about the blocks. They say, "They are shiny. They are cold. They are red and yellow and blue. They have different shapes. There are two circles." The teacher tells the children that the blocks will be available on a shelf in the manipulative and table toy area for them to use. During the week the teacher watches the children play with the attribute blocks. She notes that Marc and Suzanna have used the blocks often and have developed an interesting trading game which they play. She asks them to explain their game to her. They explain that they divide the blocks by color and then try to find the shapes that are the same. Tim comes over to play. The teacher brings three boxes to the table. She then asks the three children to try to put each block into one of the three boxes. Suzanna and Marc try sorting the blocks in different ways and finally agree to sort by shape, color, and thickness. Tim loses interest and starts to trace the remaining blocks with a pencil onto colored paper. The teacher comments on the ingenuity of each of the children.

In this classroom children are permitted to choose the way in which they use the materials that are in each activity center. They explore the materials on their own and with their classmates. They invent different ways to use the same materials. The teacher's role is to observe the children at work and to encourage initiative. She poses questions that stimulate further exploration and the acquisition of higher level skills. The

informal atmosphere permits children to learn at different rates, without being compared to one another, and without the pressure of having to do it in only one "correct" way.

Active Play

Play is the heart of good early childhood programs. The research on play shows that it is an important part of the lives of young children (Johnson, Christie, Yawkey, 1987). Play and development unfold together, so environments for young children should allow for ongoing opportunities for free play. Play occurs in a wide variety of ways—in solitary play with objects, in unstructured, associative play with one other child, in interactive and complex dramatic play with props and other children, and as children get older, in more structured play in group games. Experts maintain the following:

> Children need to play in order to develop cognitive and motor skills and to learn about the social world and their place in it. Children develop social skills through interaction with their peers. They learn what rules are, how rules are made, and what justice and fairness are about. They learn how to cooperate and how to share. They develop self-esteem by successfully challenging themselves, by interacting with other children and by mastering personal, physical, intellectual and social challenges (Frost and Jacobs, 1995, p. 47).

By following the lead of children, adults make possible the kind of play that is cognitively and emotionally necessary for children. Stanley Greenspan, a highly respected child psychiatrist in the United States, has been studying the emotional needs of children for many years. He advocates "floor time" for teachers and parents with their young children (Greenspan, 1989). By getting on the floor with children, teachers and parents can join in mutual give-and-take, allowing the chil-

dren to lead and guide the play.

In a child-centered program children are given many opportunities to engage in play of their choice both indoors and outdoors. The playground should provide a wide range of natural and man-made materials for children to use—sand and dirt for digging, climbing structures for physical challenges, construction materials for building, props for dramatic play, and balls for organized games. Gardens and pets encourage caring and maintenance. The well-designed playground provides safe opportunities for adventure, risk-taking, and freedom from the adult world. In the classroom, play is much of what children do—in activity centers, with materials, with props, alone and with others. Teachers who model playfulness themselves will better appreciate the importance of an environment that allows for different opportunities and times for play.

Play and pretending are also ways children act out their feelings and try to understand their world. For example, after a terrible fire destroyed a building near the kindergarten, killing many people, the children began regressing in their behavior: thumb-sucking increased; children who were toilet-trained began wetting themselves; temper tantrums and clinging occurred more frequently; and a sense of tension and fear pervaded. The teachers began discussing the fire with the children to uncover their beliefs and fears. They set up a hospital in the dramatic play area and a fire station in the block area, so the children could act out saving the lives of the dolls and each other. They had pretend funerals for the dead people and wrote stories about their sadness. Through play and unrushed discussion, children were helped to regain a sense of control over the trauma they had experienced. Play provided a catharsis for acting out their fears.

Use and Variety of Materials

A parent once asked whether children would not tire of using the unit blocks over several years. If one watches a typi-

cal three-year old build with blocks and then watches a typical six-year old use the same blocks, the differences are amazing. The three-year old lays the blocks in a row and then places several on top of one another. If other children are involved he may engage in parallel play. After about ten or fifteen minutes the child moves on to another activity center. The six-year old, however, often has an image in mind of what she wants to build—a castle with turrets and a moat with a drawbridge. The child will work alone or, more often, with others to construct this complex building—arguing and discussing the merits of placing the half circle block over the columns to support the draw bridge. The work of the six-year old is complex, more abstract, and can extend for a longer period of time. Blocks can be made more interesting by adding accessories such as miniature people, animals, signs, dolls, paper and markers, and other props that can be rotated and changed throughout the year.

Many of the materials found in well-equipped kindergartens are **open-ended**, which means that they can be used in different ways by children of differing ages and abilities. Teachers should evaluate the materials in activity centers for their versatility. Materials used in only one way, such as puzzles and board games, should be changed when children have mastered them and no longer seem interested in using them. Materials should always be neatly displayed and kept in good repair. There should be neither too many nor too few materials available. A good rule to use is to observe children's play in an activity center. If children are fighting over materials, there may be too few from which to choose. If, however, children are not using certain materials, they may have too many choices. If an activity center is not used often, the materials probably need to be changed.

For example, the children may remain at the sand table for no more than five minutes and then move to another activity center. The tools in the sand table may have been the

same for two months—cups, wooden spoons, and two sifters. The children are tired of using the same materials over and over. No new learning is occurring. Observing the children in each activity center, the teacher recognizes that a change is needed. Perhaps emptying the sand out of the table, pouring in water, and adding a pump and food coloring for the children to use will re-ignite the children's interest.

The teacher should review each activity center weekly to determine what needs to change and what should remain the same. The cues come from the children as well as from the teacher's desire to introduce new, compelling materials which provide challenges and new learning opportunities.

Teacher Responsibility

Teacher-Directed Practice

Every day the teacher, Barbara, reads a story to the children. She speaks in a monotone voice as she reads to the whole class. She sits in a large chair and shows few pictures to the children. When she finishes the story there is a short discussion of the book.

Teachers should remember how to have fun. There are few things more rewarding than the joy expressed by a child who has joined with his teacher to write a story or make up a silly joke or take time to discuss a new interest. Teachers who communicate their enthusiasm to children make learning exciting and vital. Teachers who are aloof and authoritarian may frighten children and actually inhibit their curiosity. The teacher models the qualities that she wants to help develop in the children—empathy, caring, enthusiasm, and intellectual curiosity.

Child-Centered Practice

The teacher, Barbara, and children sit on the floor reading a favorite story for the tenth time. She reads with warmth and animation, stopping frequently to ask the children, "What comes next?" They shout out the next sentence and the teacher continues to read. They stop to look at the pictures and to expand upon the story. The teacher makes the children feel that the story is theirs. She is interested in the children's ideas and takes the time to build upon the reading experience.

Development of Community

One expert has written, "In today's world, it is particularly urgent that we extend beyond the domain of self and the lessons of self-control. We need to find connections to others, and to feel ourselves members of many groups—intimate groups, community groups, and a world group. We need to teach children to give care as well as to receive care" (Charney, 1992, p. 32).

Charney further writes that teachers build community each day by expecting children to:

- **Know names** Children learn and use each other's names and get to know the interests and feelings of others.
- **Take turns** Children begin to learn how to take turns. As they get older, turn-taking occurs often without arguing or quitting the activity.
- **Share** Children learn to share attention, private time with the teacher, space at the sand box, snacks, and crayons.
- **Make room in the circle** Children learn to make room for latecomers to the circle and to sit with children who are not their best friends.

- **Join activities** Children learn how to join small groups in a constructive manner.
- **Invite others to join** Children learn how to extend invitations which will bring others into their activities.
- **Be friendly** Children learn how to greet and express interest in others.
- **Cooperate** Children cooperate on projects, solve problems together, and play games as a team or in a group.
- **Solve conflicts** Children learn that by talking about problems, sharing feelings and points of view, conflicts can be resolved effectively.

The classroom routine should allow children to interact with others in a variety of ways, in large and small groups and with one or two children at a time. For example, Sam, a six-year old watches as four-year old Nikolas struggles to put together a difficult puzzle of a space ship. Sam sits next to Nikolas and asks if he can play. Sam matches the shape of the puzzle piece to the shape of another piece. Sam puts one piece in and Nikolas tries the next. By watching and discussing strategies, Nikolas has gained a new skill. Sam feels good about teaching and helping his young friend.

Although this interaction is taking place in a mixed age group, similar learning occurs when children with different skills and interests are encouraged to work together. As they act out roles as leaders, followers, experts, or learners, they begin to solve problems and to emulate each other's problem-solving behaviors. Negotiating, communicating, and compromising are best learned through interactions with others. When children practice the skills of interaction, they become comfortable using them. These kinds of skills will be necessary to maintain successful relationships throughout life.

Self-Efficacy and Responsibility

Teacher-Directed Practice

Sonja wants to join a group of children who are playing train with three chairs in a row. Because she is a small child, she has trouble lifting and carrying a chair to the train. As she begins to drag one, the teacher takes it from her saying, "Let me help you, you are so small to carry such a heavy chair."

In this situation the teacher fostered dependence and incompetence rather than self-efficacy and responsibility. Children often surprise teachers and parents by being far more competent at caring for their belongings, cleaning up after themselves and working more independently than adults expect. Good early childhood programs provide real life opportunities for children to make decisions, take responsibility, and do as much as they can for themselves without adult assistance. As children overcome challenges, they develop mastery and self-confidence in their own abilities.

Development of Self-Efficacy

In most instances teachers should not do for children what they can do for themselves. Feeding, toileting, and dressing are among the important self-help skills mastered by toddlers and pre-school aged children. In kindergarten when adults feed children, clean up for them, dress them, and in

other ways infantilize them, adults give the clear message that children are not capable. Instead teachers should communicate to children that they are able to do many things on their own.

Teachers learn to distinguish between assistance and intervention: helping a child who is unable to complete a physically or developmentally difficult task, but not intervening when the child is trying hard to complete the task alone. Sometimes teachers intervene because it is faster, easier, or too painful to watch the child struggle. But even the child who is unable to perform the entire task could carry out part of it. For example, a child was unable to cut his meat without help, so the teacher encouraged him to use the knife to cut the potatoes, bread and carrots on his plate. Children feel a great sense of pride and accomplishment when they can put on their coats by themselves or wash off the tables after snack.

Development of Responsibility

Responsible children grow up to be responsible citizens. Through practice children learn to understand their impact on material objects and other people. The kindergarten environment provides children with many opportunities to practice this important life skill. Shelves that are labeled help children learn to put away their materials after each use. Making a job chart with rotating jobs such as waiter (snack helper, lunch table setter),

janitor (floor sweeper), zoo keeper (pet feeder), botanist (plant waterer), teacher (attendance taker), musician (selector of songs), librarian (book chooser), allows children to participate in the daily maintenance of the classroom.

When children help decide on class rules and abide by those rules, they function as part of a democratic community. When teachers insist that children work out a solution to a disagreement, they learn to accept the consequences of their actions. In child-centered classrooms children are viewed as competent and responsible. They are encouraged to do real work and participate in the decisions that govern this work. Teachers take pleasure in finding and creating opportunities for children to become true partners in the learning process.

Child-centered classrooms are dynamic and convey a sense of excitement and energy. As children are involved in their important work and play, they reflect their teacher's confidence in them. They feel competent, responsible, and are empowered to do their best.

Child-Centered Practice

As the teacher watches Sonja struggle to drag a heavy chair over to the group of children playing train, she has several options. She can praise her by saying, "Sonja, you are doing a good job moving that heavy chair." She can allow Sonja to continue dragging it. Or if it seems too difficult for Sonja, she might say, "Let me know if you would like some help." If Sonja says that she does need help, the teacher may ask, "Do you want to ask Marie to help move it?" Or she might suggest, "Let's move it together."

Individualization

A child-centered classroom involves many levels of individualized learning. Most group activities are conducted in small groups to maximize the amount of individualization. This means adjusting the schedule to each child's needs for activity and rest. The equipment, materials, and layout of the

classroom enhance the growth of every child and the activities chosen are relevant to each child. Individualization also requires that the teacher create activities which make each child feel successful and challenged. Is this a realistic goal? Perhaps not for each child at all times, but it is possible to optimize the amount of individualization which occurs in the classroom. By planning flexible and interesting activities for children, by carefully observing children during activities, the teacher can change and adapt the activities as needed. Individualization is an important part of a child-centered curriculum because the more individualization there is, the more effective a teacher will be. Behavior problems will decrease and the amount of learning and growth will increase (Saifer, 1990).

Activity centers allow children to individualize for themselves based on their skills and interests. For example, in the art area one child tears paper while another uses scissors to cut out a complex shape. In the manipulative area, one child chooses a four-piece wooden puzzle while another chooses a twenty-five piece cardboard puzzle. The teacher observes the children and takes notes on their development. Over time she provides the children with more challenging materials or, when necessary, more direct help in mastering a challenging skill.

Dimensions of the Individual

It is very important for teachers to understand the key dimensions of the individual. Accommodating the individual aspects of each learner is a cornerstone of effective teaching. For each dimension, the characteristics of two hypothetical children, Deni and Niki, will be discussed in a nonjudgmental and noncomparative way. It is important to respond to the individuality of each child and not judge or evaluate it.

Family Culture

Perhaps the most salient characteristic of each individual and family is its culture. One family may include individuals from different national cultures. Culture determines much

about what individuals think and value and how they behave. Deni's family likes to spend time at home quietly watching television, reading, and playing games. Niki's family is very sociable and gregarious and includes many people such as aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. They enjoy lively conversation with many friends and neighbors coming and going. Singing and dancing are favorite recreational activities.

An effective teacher will have different expectations for how Deni and Niki will act in kindergarten, what they will enjoy doing, and how to best interact with them. Home visits are important because they give teachers insight into family and culture.

There are significant differences in values and beliefs among cultures which affect behavior. However, it is essential for teachers to consider the culture of the family first because individual families are unique. There are too many aspects of family culture to discuss here, nevertheless, one aspect is critical: **time**. Some families, in some cultures, view time as flexible. Families in other cultures view time as rigid. This is an important consideration for teachers because a child's view of time may conflict with the teacher's view. This kind of conflict can produce tension and stress with neither the teacher nor the child being fully aware of the cause. Deni has internalized time as being rigid; therefore he adapts readily to the regimented schedule of his teacher wherein activities begin and end promptly regardless of children's needs or desires. But Niki has a difficult time accepting that an activity she is enjoying must end just because it is indicated on the schedule.

Age

Obviously, three-year-old children act and think differently than four or five-year-old children. Remembering the stages of normal child development is paramount for teachers. For example, most five-year-old children can concentrate longer, communicate more effectively, engage in more interactive pretend play, and understand abstract concepts better than most

three-and four-year-old children. Age is an important factor when determining what activities to provide, how to provide them, and for how long.

Deni is five and Niki is three. Deni enjoys spending fifteen to twenty minutes doing one or two twenty-four piece puzzles. Niki will spend no more than five to ten minutes doing two or three puzzles of six or eight pieces.

Developmental Level

Age reveals much about a child, but within any group of three-year old children there is great variance in ability and functioning. Some will function more like typical two-year olds and some like typical four-year olds and most somewhere in-between. There is at least a variance of two years in the developmental level within most classrooms of children of the same chronological age. If there are particularly gifted or developmentally delayed children in the class, then the variance will be even greater. It is, therefore, not enough to consider chronological age alone, the teacher must also consider the child's developmental level in order to effectively individualize for each child. To further complicate matters, the development of children is often uneven; a child may be advanced in language and communication, but delayed in motor abilities. Deni's overall developmental level is typical for his age of five, but he is somewhat advanced in math. Niki is functioning about one year ahead in most areas, especially in language and communication, music and movement, but often needs assistance in the small motor area.

Personality and Temperament

There are many characteristics of personality and temperament and for each characteristic there is a continuum along which each child can be placed. Some possible combinations are:

serious/light-hearted	easygoing/intense
energetic/calm	fastidious/messy
extroverted/introverted	risk-taker/cautious
curious/indifferent	trusting/skeptical

Teachers need to be aware that their own personalities and temperament may clash or mesh with those of individual children. By understanding these differences and accepting them, teachers can improve the quality of life of children.

The process of individualization is made easier by the knowledge that one child has a need to talk and interact with others to learn well, while another child's learning is optimized when she works quietly on her own. By weighing such factors the teacher makes sure that the child is choosing appropriately and not, for example, isolating herself because she fears being rejected by others or lacks the skills to interact effectively. This may be difficult to determine because children who cannot do something often simply refuse to do it (Tobin, 1991). Deni is quieter, more introverted, and cautious than Niki.

Gender

Gender difference is so obvious that it is often overlooked when teachers consider the dimensions of the individual. Teachers often witness gender-based behavior, such as boys engaging in loud, physical, rough-and-tumble play and girls preferring language-based, social, and organized play. It is natural to allow children to select playmates and activities, even if these decisions are gender-based. But it is equally important to encourage all children to make decisions not based on gender to expand their competencies. Niki's favorite activity is playing "family" with dolls in the dramatic play area with four other close girl friends. Her second favorite activity is building with blocks. Deni's favorite activity is building Lego structures with one other male friend and his second favorite is racing little cars around a track he makes with blocks. Their teacher is planning to help Deni find ways to play with more children (both boys and girls) while he races his cars. The teacher is planning to invite Niki and her close friends to the manipulative table to show them how to use some of the construction toys.

Learning Style

Some children learn slowly while others learn quickly. (This is not necessarily an indication of intelligence as some slow learners understand concepts more thoroughly than quick learners). Some children are highly dependent on others to learn well, while other children learn better on their own. Often a child has a primary sensory learning modality. This means that one child may rely mostly on his visual sense to obtain information and to interpret the world. Another child may do the same with his keen auditory, tactile, or feeling sense. Like personality and temperament, learning style characteristics exist on a continuum along which a child can be placed. These characteristics are particularly noticeable when a child is at the extremes of the continuum. When this is the case, teaching strategies must be adjusted accordingly. Niki is at the extreme end of the continuum as an auditory learner. Her sense of hearing is acute, and she does not rely primarily on visual learning as many children do. When picking out tunes on a piano she does better if she closes her eyes. She avoids drawing and craft activities.

Deni is extremely visual. He rarely chooses music activities, but creates colorful and representational pictures full of people, houses and cars. Unlike Niki, Deni will likely forget what he is told, but a visual cue will help him remember. A picture hanging above the sink of children washing their hands is a good way to remind Deni to wash after using the toilet.

Interests

Most children have at least one particular interest. Some are fascinated by big trucks and machines, or dinosaurs, or a certain sport, or a particular activity in kindergarten. Using these interests, the teacher can incorporate activities from all areas of the curriculum. Sometimes children only express and pursue their interests at home, so it is necessary to ask parents about them. In some cases the teacher might build a theme around the interest of one or several children. For example,

when Niki and one of her friends show an intense interest in horses, her teacher creates a theme which involves riding horses, reading books (fiction and nonfiction) about horses, making horses (art and crafts), showing the relative average heights of various kinds of horses and then graphing them (math), and singing songs about horses. Although the theme develops because of the interest of two children, almost all the children enjoy the activities. Deni has a deep interest in the way mechanical things work. Seeing this, his teacher brings in some basic tools and old clocks and radios for him, and anyone else who might be interested, to take apart.

Strengths and Needs

All children have strengths, skills they do particularly well, and needs, skills they require help with to do better. Sometimes strengths and needs are inextricably linked. Deni's art and fine motor ability are his greatest strengths, but he often needs help in learning to play with other children. Niki's dancing and singing ability is exceptional, but the teacher often assists Niki when she cuts with scissors. Good teachers build on abilities and interests which are often the same to help children strengthen their weaknesses. Deni's teacher pairs him with another child, who has a great interest and talent in art, by arranging for them to paint together on a large piece of paper. She helps Niki learn to cut by making up a silly song called, "The Cut, Cut Song" which she and Niki sing together when she helps Niki use scissors. This allows Niki to relax and enjoy herself while struggling with a difficult task.

Self-Concept

How children perceive themselves, how realistically they know their own strengths and needs, and how they judge their own ability to undertake a particular task are indicators of self-concept. All children will come into the class with differing self-concepts. Some view themselves as incapable, others as extremely capable, and most fall somewhere between the two. Overconfidence, that is, wrongly believing in one's abil-

ity to accomplish a task is just as problematic as a lack of confidence, that is, wrongly believing in one's inability to accomplish a task. Teachers can help children develop a realistic sense of themselves and also teach them to identify and find resources to solve problems (an important part of self-efficacy) when they determine accurately that a particular task is too difficult for children to do on their own. Increasing self-efficacy has a positive affect on self-concept. Niki has a generally good self-concept and she tends to approach new tasks and difficult situations with hope and enthusiasm. Deni has a lower self-concept which his teacher discovered when she heard him say that he was not very good at art. She now tells him often, and in specific terms, what she believes makes his drawings and paintings particularly good. She also makes sure he has many opportunities to lead and to make choices to increase his sense of efficacy which, over time, will positively improve his self-concept.

PARENT PAGE

Your child's kindergarten program may look very different from the one you attended or that your other children have attended. In this program the classroom mirrors a democratic society. Teachers, children, and parents create an open atmosphere for learning and creative expression. The environment provides a safe place for children to explore materials and ideas, express their thoughts and feelings, and learn from their successes and mistakes. Teachers and children treat each other with respect and care. This kind of environment is often called child-centered.

A child-centered classroom is built around two core beliefs:

- Children learn best from their direct experiences and interactions with the world around them.
- Teachers foster the growth and development of children best by building on their interests, needs, and strengths.

In a child-centered classroom:

- Children make choices.
- Children learn through active play.
- Children use materials in creative, flexible ways.
- Children play with all toys (boys with dolls and girls with trucks).
- Children take responsibility for themselves and their classrooms.
- Teachers take responsibility to make the day fun and engaging.
- Teachers individualize.

Parents are welcome members of the kindergarten program. You are encouraged to participate in all aspects of your child's experience at school and continue the learning at home.

To build on the child-centered concept you should:

- Allow your child to make safe choices (choose his or her clothing for school, decide with which toys to play, and from which cup to drink).
- Take time to play with and listen to your child.
- Expect your child to help with simple chores such as setting the table.
- Have books and toys available (borrowed from the kindergarten) for your child.
- Discuss your child's strengths and needs with the teacher.
- Participate in your child's kindergarten program.

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CHAPTER 3

CREATION OF A PLAN FOR THE CHILD-CENTERED CLASSROOM

Teacher-Directed Practice

The teacher, Judith, plans a lesson for her three-and four-year-old children about autumn because it is the first week of October. She plans to ask the entire class of children what happens to leaves and which are the gifts of autumn. If no one volunteers to say "fruits and vegetables," she will tell them that these are some of the gifts of autumn. She plans to hold up several different fruits and vegetables and ask the children about each one, "Is it a fruit or vegetable? What is its color and shape? Is it rough or smooth?" She then cuts the fruits and vegetables and gives a bite to each child. Next she asks about the fruit's smell and taste. She has allowed twenty to thirty minutes for this activity. She then plans several more themes for the month: transportation, clothing, and farm animals.

The previous chapter discusses primarily how to work with children in a child-centered way. However, many teachers find that their traditional training has focused on the knowledge children should acquire. There are often clear and strong expectations on teachers to teach certain topics, themes, or to teach specific skills by a certain age. This chapter will focus on the issue of how to decide what to teach and provide some suggestions on effective methods of teaching. When teachers plan, they usually do both together. In many cases, the subject matter influences the way in which a lesson is taught. For example, a theme on mushrooms would

lend itself easily to hands-on activities (handling and tasting different mushrooms), classifying activities (sorting mushrooms by type), and art activities (drawing and modeling with clay). In contrast, a theme on African animals would lend itself much less easily to some of these activities.

In the situation above, Judith tries to develop a lesson that actively involves the children. Although her intentions are good, she errs in planning without taking into consideration her observations of the children's interests and needs. She also plans to ask many closed questions (those with one right answer) rather than open-ended questions (those that ask children to describe something or tell a story or give an opinion). Perhaps unintentionally, the teacher treats the children as "empty vessels" into which she will pour information. Her planning consists of deciding, somewhat arbitrarily, what information to pour into the "vessels." She also errs in conducting the activity with a large group of children rather than with a small group of interested children. A small group activity would give the children more time for firsthand experience and give the teacher many more ways to individualize the activity. Another error is that she decides to present information that is too broad and somewhat abstract. Categorizing produce into fruits and vegetables is not an easy task (is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable?) and one in which few children are very interested. They are usually more interested in eating them. Also, the teacher is planning to present too many different fruits and vegetables at once. It may be more appropriate to focus just on apples. The teacher might show and encourage the children to taste several varieties (colors) of apples and discuss how and where they are grown.

Plans of what to teach children, which are the basis of the curriculum activities, should come from at least three sources: first, from the observation of individual children and the goals that a teacher sets for individual children; second, from the teacher's understanding of her particular group of children (their unique interests, strengths, needs, characteristics, con-

cerns, and living circumstances); third, from the teacher's general knowledge of children and their development. For example, she knows that a group of mostly three-year-old children usually need simpler, more concrete, and more sensory activities than most six-year-old children.

Goals for Individual Children

From observing children and talking with their families, teachers get to know children's particular strengths, needs, and interests. Observational checklist forms make it easier for teachers to gather this information and to include systematically all areas of children's development. These forms require teachers to prioritize what they observe, because in theory hundreds of observations can be made about a child. Based on this knowledge, teachers then decide on a few goals for each child. For example, for one child the goals are to participate in a variety of activities in the classroom and to learn to negotiate taking turns with other children more easily. For another child the goals are to count up to ten and to contribute more to discussion at meal times and during small group activities. Yet another child's goals are to sort by three characteristics, to write her first and last name, and to allow other children to sometimes take lead roles in plays. In each case, social, emotional, cognitive, language, health habits, and all other areas of development are considered when setting goals.

To implement these goals, teachers must get to know the dimensions of each child. Strategies, which are specific methods for helping children achieve their goals, are based on these dimensions, such as interests, strengths, learning style, and personality. It is a good idea to develop several possible strategies for implementing each goal in order to test the most effective ones. Strategies for helping a child who is independent to count to ten might involve opportunities to count in solitary games, activities, and routines. The teacher might suggest that the child stack ten square blocks on the shelf when

putting the blocks away. Strategies for helping a child who is social count to ten might involve more small group activities, such as counting together with the teacher or with a capable peer, pairing the child with another to count out the plates for the lunch table, and interactive counting in a game with other children.

Strategies must also be based on principles of effective teaching which prepare children to function in a democratic society. Teaching a child to count to ten, regardless of individual characteristics, should incorporate many active games, manipulatives, and opportunities to count which grow out of real life situations. Other examples might include counting the number of days until a holiday arrives and counting the number of raisins for each child at snack to ensure that each has an equal and fair share.

Frequently, teachers ask how often and how many individual activities should be provided as part of the curriculum? It is very difficult to provide a definitive answer because of the differences among teachers and children, but the following suggestion is recommended as general guidance for teachers to refine according to the needs and abilities of the children. A plan of daily activities should contain one individualized activity for at least two different children. In this way at least ten different children will receive a minimum of one individualized activity each week. Over the course of one month, each child in the class will participate in two individualized activities because many children share the same goal. It is sometimes possible and expedient to conduct individualized activities for more than one child at the same time. For example, one small group activity can be planned for two or three children who need to practice their negotiating skills.

Documentation and Tracking of Individual Progress

An important part of the written documentation for planning are the observations, goals, and strategies for individual children previously described. It is useful to maintain this information in a file for each child. Observations should be ongoing and continuous, so that when a child's goal is met, a new one can be established. In addition, it is helpful to have a one-or two-page form that lists all the children in the class with a brief description of their goals and strategies as a reference when preparing lesson plans. The lesson plan should include brief information about the ten children who will participate in an individualized activity: their names (or symbols or initials); how and when an activity will be presented to them (strategies). Lesson plans should describe the individualization that will occur. Often teachers are very creative and can conduct highly effective individualized activities spontaneously. In this case, the teacher should document the activity and its results on all the planning forms and in the children's individual files. In reality, the forms serve both a planning and documentation purpose. They are used together by teachers and families as aids in developing plans to meet children's individual learning needs and to record the progress of these children.

Dimensions of the Group

The second major source of plans comes from the particular group of children. Each group of children is unique. They and the teacher form a little community which has its own culture. Curriculum ideas and their manner of presentation must respond to this group; what is engaging to one group of children is not engaging to another. One teacher developed a two-week theme about spiders after noticing her children's intense interest in a spider found in the outdoor play area. Another teacher planned a theme about bears when her chil-

dren became fascinated by a "bear" character in a book read to them. (Because of the rural lõcation of this kindergarten, many children were familiar with bears). Another teacher planned a theme about the birth of babies when she observed that three of the children's mothers were pregnant and a fourth had just given birth. Hospitalization became a theme in another class when two of the children were scheduled for surgery. Fishing became a theme for another group of children when the teacher observed the children's excited reactions to people fishing along a river during a walk. Fire fighting and fire safety became a theme after a house in the neighborhood of the school burned down.

The activities conducted within these themes are adjusted to the skills, age, and interests of the children. To illustrate the bear theme, the teacher made a large twenty-five-piece puzzle of a bear cub and a mother for a group of children who love to do puzzles. For another group of children who liked art activities and bears, the teacher organized a group project constructing a life-sized bear from boxes and cartons. The construction of this bear--planning, organizing, building, paint-

ing, fixing—took over two weeks.

The teacher can incorporate children's individual goals within the activities of the theme. The children whose goal is to count to ten can count all the boxes available and then the specific number of boxes required to construct the bear.

Development of Young Children

The third source of ideas for planning activities and how to present them comes from the teachers' expertise about children. Some topics are important to a majority of children between three years old and seven years old in most cultures. The list includes families, familiar animals, babies, water, cars and trucks, separation, fairness, favorite foods (simple cooking), music, friends, scary things, and shopping. In short, all that children deal with and experience directly in their daily lives. Almost any of these topics, if adjusted according to the age, ability level, culture and character of the group, would form the basis of a successful and engaging educational experience in kindergarten.

The teacher would present a theme on water very differently to a group of two-to three-year-old children than to a group of six-to seven-year-old children. Most of the activities planned for the younger group would involve sensory experience, and would be simple and concrete. The activities could include: providing a variety of materials with which to play in water (funnels, tubes, sieves, cups); freezing and unfreezing water (tasting ice); walking in the rain and splashing in puddles; drinking water; and water coloring. More complex and abstract activities would appeal to older children: looking at pond water under a microscope to identify one or two simple microbes; determining the freezing and boiling temperature of water; visiting different types of bodies of water (river, sea, lake, pond); demonstrating the process of evaporation and condensation; and determining the path of water from its source to the tap.

Child-Centered Practice

The teacher decides to develop a theme about elephants with her group of four-to five-year-old children when a baby elephant is born at the local zoo. She plans to ask the children, whom she has divided into small groups, what they know and think of elephants. Then, with parents help, she takes them on a field trip to the zoo. At the zoo she will purchase a variety of books about elephants. From the particular interests of the children, which grow out of their study of elephants, she will plan further. Based on their expressed interest, two or three small groups of children will tackle in-depth projects about some aspect of elephants. One group project might be to create a life-size figure of an elephant. Another project idea might be to make an appropriate gift for the baby elephant, a gift to help her grow healthy and strong. However, in these situations the children will require the teacher's assistance in determining the feasibility of the project and in executing it. She does not expect all the children in the class to pursue the theme beyond its initial stage.

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Your child's teacher individualizes her curriculum to meet the needs and interests of your child. To do this successfully, the teacher needs information from you about your child's strengths, weaknesses, uniqueness, interests, and personality. From this information you and the teacher can decide on goals for your child and the best ways to achieve those goals both in school and at home. For this reason, it is very important to communicate often both formally and informally with your child's teacher.

For example, Lena is a five-year-old child who loves many different physical activities. She is very coordinated and capable and seems always in motion. Her mother and father fear that sometimes she endangers herself and her numerous cuts and bruises attest to their concern. Also, they have remarked that she has little patience or interest in sedentary activities.

After Lena's parents and Lena's teacher meet, they decide to set two goals for her for the next four months. One is to help her take more reasonable risks when involved in physical activities and the other is to increase the amount of her drawing and writing. Based on her personality and interests, they meet the first goal by playing with her more often and explaining the reasons a particular action is too risky. Then, together with Lena, they find a safer course of action, such as supplying her with knee-pads or placing a mat under a climber. To achieve the second goal Lena is encouraged to put on an "Olympic" event with her friends. As this activity develops, Lena makes the posters, charts, rules, and signs needed for the event. Later Lena and the other children act out short folk tales that involve extensive physical movement. This second activity requires not only physical movement, but also the creation of posters, programs, letters of invitation, signs, and props.

In this example, you see how the needs and interests of Lena and the other children greatly influence the curriculum. The ideas for the materials and activities most appropriate in the classroom and the ideas for interaction with specific children come from the children themselves. An "Olympic" event of this type would be fun and educational for many children and it is possible for your child's teacher to incorporate the goals of individual children into this activity. You also see the benefits to Lena when her parents and teachers cooperate. The goals originated when her parents and teachers observed Lena and thoughtfully planned for her.

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CHAPTER 4

EQUALITY

Teacher-Directed Practice

Carl and Julie play with two sets of figures of family members in the block area. One set of figures has dark skin, and the other light. Lissa joins them, points to the dark figures and says, "We don't like those people because they're bad." They all make faces at the dark figures. The teacher observes and chooses not to intervene.

This situation describes a practice in need of change because the teacher is permitting racist behavior. By not intervening, she signals tacit approval of the thoughts and behaviors of the children.

Accepting people who are different and living peacefully with them are adult responsibilities. If adults fulfilled their responsibilities in this area, schools would not need to focus on the problem of prejudice in the classroom. However, kindergarten teachers play a critical role in developing peaceful, kind, and tolerant attitudes of children toward one another. Research shows that by age three, many children have negative views of people who are different than themselves (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

Most nations have a history of hostility among culturally different groups. Many ethnic wars stem from this history. However, increasingly, multicultural and diverse populations will depend upon one another to promote prosperity and protect freedom. The kindergarten is an important place to begin

that process: children are innocent of the crimes of their parents and should not inherit their legacy. One generation after the Japanese and Americans fought a war, the children of these enemies now trade, visit each other's countries, read each other's literature, listen to each other's music, share fashions, and jointly build cars. Changes are possible in one short generation.

Children have to live in more than one culture. For example, a child has to know how to act appropriately with her father's side of the family, with her mother's side of the family, and at kindergarten. In each situation there may be different culturally determined expectations for behaving, dressing, and talking. There are a variety of ways teachers can reinforce multicultural competence in children. Teachers and administrators can model appreciation of people who are different, include children from many cultures in their programs, expose children to the customs of different cultures, and teach children the skills to resolve conflict peacefully.

Assuring equality goes beyond cultural, ethnic, or language issues. It means that teachers support the needs of all children and families and counteract bias against people because of their gender (male or female), age, physical appearance (attractiveness, weight, physical disability), ability (advanced, typical, or delayed), or religious beliefs (Jewish, Christian, Muslim). In classrooms which promote democracy, appreciating differences among people and accepting them is a central goal of the curriculum. It may be the most important goal. In the long-term, teaching a child to appreciate differences among people transcends the importance of teaching typical kindergarten skills such as cutting and counting. The impact of teaching children to appreciate one another will profoundly affect world peace, one child and family at a time.

Multicultural Competence

The teacher must create an environment where the children feel that the practices of their home culture (or cultures) are valued and important. Teachers are also responsible for developing children's competence in the culture of the kindergarten. For example, the child will be expected to avoid eye contact with adults at home because eye contact is a sign of disrespect, while in kindergarten, the teacher may consider it disrespectful if the child does not make eye contact. Cultural practices tend to be deeply ingrained, automatic, and unconscious. The teacher may not be aware that the child is behaving appropriately within the context of her culture and, therefore, not understand the behavior or see it negatively. For this reason, teachers should become informed about the families of the children in the class—their beliefs, values, daily routines, expectations, and customs. Family routines can be introduced into the classroom routines. At lunch time, teachers might occasionally sing the song that Andres's family sings before they eat at home or tell Mira's family's favorite bedtime story to the children at nap time.

It is important to assure the parents of all children that family practices are respected and admired. Teachers must make it clear that they do not wish the children to act differently at home, even though behavior expectations may differ at kindergarten. A behavior that is functional and effective at home may be problematic at school and a behavior that is functional and effective at kindergarten may be problematic at home. Although this is difficult for young children, the teacher's task is to help them learn the skills to be effective both at home and at kindergarten. A child may have to physically defend himself in his home neighborhood. Naturally, he will enter the kindergarten prepared and willing to use force to defend himself. However, with the teacher's guidance, he can learn nonaggressive ways to respond to provocation. These ways may never be useful in his neighborhood, so she should not expect

him to apply them there. But he will have learned that he has a choice of how to behave. He is a more effective person as a result. This is an example of multicultural competence.

Sometimes teachers and parents will conflict over cultural practices, such as those previously mentioned. It is necessary for the teacher to keep an open mind when parents want her to behave in ways that she is uncomfortable with or feels are detrimental to the child. The teacher must determine if the differences between herself and the parents are related to different cultural perspectives. Seeing the issue from their perspective, the teacher negotiates a solution or compromise. For example, a teacher who felt it was essential that children get messy and dirty at school (because they needed to be active to best promote their development), conflicted with parents who did not want their children to get dirty. The parents believed that being well-dressed and clean was more important for their children than being active at school. Also, the expense of ruined clothes and the difficulty of doing so much laundry was a practical problem for these parents. By discussing the issues openly, the teacher and parents reached an agreement. The children would change into different clothes in the morning at kindergarten, and change back at the end of the day before parents picked them up.

Multilingual Classrooms

One helpful way to affirm a child's home culture is to use the child's home language or dialect in the classroom, along with the main language used in the classroom. Language is the most powerful transmitter of culture. The teacher reads books, sings songs, and teaches short poems in the various home languages of the children in the class to make these children aware that their language and culture are valued. These activities also help all the children learn about cultures different from their own. In this increasingly pluralistic world, knowledge of different languages is an asset for all people,

increasing their competence and promoting mutual respect and understanding.

In some classrooms, where a second or third language is commonly heard, or a number of the children share a language different than the dominant language, it is important to create a bilingual or trilingual classroom. This means that all children in the class learn to use and understand words and phrases in two or three languages. There are many ways to do this including teaching and using common words (numbers, common nouns) in the various languages and setting aside specific times of the day when only a nondominant language is spoken. Teachers do not have to be fluent in all the languages used by the children in their classroom, but they should speak and understand them at a basic level.

A Model of Respect

Showing respect for a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds is one of the most powerful things the teacher can do to promote equality. Using language which is polite, courteous, and deferential when discussing others, or when interacting with children, other staff, and parents demonstrates this respect. The teacher says, "Carol is home today because her family celebrates an important holiday in their religion. Let us ask her all about it when she comes to school tomorrow." Refraining from saying negative things about others, whether they are present or not, is equally important. Some people have biases, strong feelings of dislike, or mistrust for certain groups of people. The teacher is a model who can prevent negative feelings from being transmitted to children by refraining from making negative comments. She must work to discover and change her own biases and assure that they are not transmitted to children and their families.

Promotion of Integration

Replacing ignorance with knowledge of others creates understanding and compassion between people and breaks down the walls of prejudice. This occurs most effectively through direct experience over an extended period of time. Bringing diversity into the kindergarten is an excellent strategy for promoting equality. The teacher works towards integrating the kindergarten with a variety of children from various ethnic and language groups, religions, ages (mixed age groupings), and ability levels (including children with a variety of disabilities). Although this complicates the teacher's job, she will also be able to more easily teach understanding and appreciation of a wide variety of differences. It is hard work to overcome prejudice (often based on old myths and superstitions) that some parents, some staff, and some children express, but it is only through direct experiences with differences that young children can really learn tolerance.

When it is not possible to integrate the kindergarten, the least that can be done is to have available many pictures, books, puzzles, dolls, and other materials that reflect the variations in people. The teacher engages children in activities that demonstrate different cultural practices for common activities. For example, the children can experience concretely the various ways people in different parts of the world carry objects (on the head, shoulder, yoke across both shoulders), the utensils people use to eat (chopsticks, fingers, bread, fork, wooden spoon), and the kinds of bread people eat (tortillas and other flat breads, braided breads, Swedish rye, English muffins, French baguettes). The teacher can make these different customs relevant by bringing in contemporary pictures of adults and children eating with chopsticks in China or carrying baskets in Nigeria.

The teacher avoids promoting stereotypes. She shows the children pictures of people in costumes that are worn at special events or were worn in the distant past. It is especially

important to present pictures of the same kinds of people in contemporary settings and teach the language of neighboring countries or cultures. The children are more likely to encounter people who maintain these practices and languages in their daily lives. It is, therefore, important to replace myths and stereotypes about neighboring cultures with facts and to include practices and languages of neighboring countries in the classroom activities. This sends children a strong message that cultural practices are different and interesting rather than better or worse and that many are the same.

The teacher draws on the diversity that exists within every group of children and families. Even a very homogeneous group has a surprising amount of diversity below the surface. Each family has different hobbies, interests, talents, recreational activities, rituals, musical tastes, favorite foods, and ways they celebrate holidays. By bringing this diversity into the kindergarten, by practicing some of these ceremonial activities, the teacher teaches respect and appreciation of differences.

Bias and Teacher Intervention

Learning positive lessons from the direct experiences previously discussed often requires the guidance and intervention of a skilled teacher. If an adult or child acts in an intolerant or cruel way towards another, it is important to take action. The teacher establishes a classroom rule such as, "Everyone deserves respect and compassion. I will not allow anyone to hurt you and I will not allow you to hurt anyone." She validates the feelings of the offender by saying, "I know you are frustrated or people who are different are scary" and reminds her of the rule. She helps the child get her needs met in a way that does not harm others. She treats the incident as an aggressive act (verbal aggression is sometimes more hurtful than physical aggression), and uses the strategies discussed in Chapter 6.

The teacher must intervene if some children exclude others from their play because of bias. Just as adults have little choice about those with whom they work, children need to learn how to play with a variety of other children. Many teachers have found it useful to have a class rule about not excluding others (Paley, 1992). Making the rule work may involve the teacher assisting in clarifying communication between children (especially if the exclusion involves a child with a speech problem), helping the excluded child develop some play skills, giving him some props to use, and asking the children doing the excluding to find a role for the excluded child in the play.

Sometimes bias is not overt, but is so much a part of the social fabric of life that it seems "normal." When only boys "choose" to play with blocks and only girls "choose" to play in the dramatic play area, they are not so much freely choosing as replicating social expectations. This behavior limits choice and the development of a wide variety of abilities and skills. Here again, the teacher's intervention is needed. The most effective intervention is for the teacher to involve herself in the children's play (without being too directive), so that she can help them break away from social expectations. A female teacher models enjoyment as she uses wood-working materials, builds with blocks and plays soccer. Teachers should make sure that dramatic play clothes include male items (ties, shoes, hats) and that there are female figures among the accessories in the block area.

Child-Centered Practice

Carl and Julie are playing with two sets of figures of family members in the block area. One set of figures has dark skin, the other light. Lissa comes over, points to the dark figures and says, "We don't like those people because they're bad." They all make faces at the dark figures. A teacher who has been watching, goes to them and says, "What makes these people bad?" Lissa says, "We hate those people who look like that." The teacher responds, "Everyone deserves respect. You do not know if they are bad because of what they look like, only by the way they act. Tia has dark skin and she's your friend. Let's make a beautiful store with the blocks and the dark-skinned family can be the owners of the store." The teacher then proceeds to help them set up a little store and pretends to be one of the dark-skinned figures by asking them what they would like to buy today. She leaves the area after the children are busy playing store with the figures.

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Your child's teachers are committed to helping your child learn to accept and appreciate those who are different—whether they are smarter or slower, younger or older, whether they have a physical disability, a different language, practice a different religion, or come from a different ethnic group. At the same time the teachers want all the children to be proud of their own cultures. If there is to be peace, understanding, and democracy in the world when your child is an adult, the effort must begin now, both at school and at home.

Your help in this endeavor is very important. First, you should try to understand your own biases and prejudices. Second, you can help by showing your acceptance and appreciation of those who are different. For example, explain differences in nonjudgmental ways. You could say, "They have darker skin because their ancestors were born in a different part of the world where all people have darker skin. They have a chemical inside their bodies that makes their skin dark and it is not dirt and does not come off." Or, you might say, "That man uses a wheelchair to get around because his legs do not work. He may have been born like that or it may have happened in an accident. Let's ask him."

Third, you can help by giving information to your child's teacher about your family's practices, values, customs, and preferences. The teacher will use this information to make your child feel more comfortable at school and to teach all the children about how people have similarities and differences. For example, all families eat, but what, when, and how they eat varies from family to family, especially those from different cultures. Given this information, the teacher can create activities that demonstrate how people are different and similar.

You have much to contribute to the education of all the children in this regard. Feel free to share with the class the way your family celebrates holidays and the songs and dances you enjoy.

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CHAPTER 5

SKILLS, TALENTS, AND CREATIVITY

Teacher-Directed Practice

The teacher, Hilda, announces that all children in the kindergarten will learn a traditional folk dance. She says that they will practice every day for six weeks prior to performing for all parents. The children work hard and try to dance perfectly because the teacher says, "Everyone will be watching you, so please make no mistakes."

In most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, teachers both promote and model a high level of proficiency in music, art, dance, drama, and athletics. These important areas of the curriculum are deeply connected to the culture and heritage of each country. Folk dances, fairy tales, traditional songs and the sounds of indigenous instruments transmit cultural values and traditions from generation to generation. Eastern and Central Europe are home to some of the best performing and visual artists in the world, particularly in drama, dance, and music. Children grow up in a world of artistic excellence and in cultures that value creativity and talent.

Athletic achievement is another source of great national pride in many countries where world-class athletes excel in many sports. In kindergartens children are given many opportunities to participate in the arts and sports and they are given thorough and expert instruction in these pursuits.

In educational programs which promote child-centered practices, teachers continue, support, expand, and refine these opportunities to participate in the arts and sports. These opportunities are important for promoting, maintaining, and recovering traditional culture and they broaden the education of children. All children can develop their particular talents with the encouragement of teachers. Creating these opportunities is also conducive to individualization. In the situation above, there is no room for the individual, creative expressions of children; they are pressured to please adults.

In a child-centered classroom choices are available for children to participate in a variety of arts and athletics with skilled instruction and appropriate challenges. A wide range of activities offered at various times allows children to develop their interests and strengths. Sometimes the interests of an individual child or a group of children will determine the activities. Usually children have a favorite song or story. Curriculum activities could then include children dramatizing the favorite story complete with costumes, sets, and props (integrating needlework, crafts, and arts into this activity).

Art Instruction

The teacher can promote a high level of skill in art in a child-centered manner. She gives children choices of the subject matter and the materials and she works with small groups of children or individual children. In a preschool classroom in Reggio Emilia, Italy (where teachers do an excellent job of providing intensive visual art instruction while giving children choices), a small group of children decided to make an amusement park for the birds in their playground. A skilled art teacher worked with them over a month to design and build their structure, continuously soliciting the ideas of the children. The children chose the project, chose the materials, and built the constructions. The structure is truly a creation of the children not the adults. (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman).

In traditional classrooms the teacher often provides a drawing or model that the children copy. All the children draw trees with brown trunks, green round tops with pink flowers—their houses all have triangular roofs, a chimney with smoke, two windows, and a door. During holidays the children make cards for their families that are all alike. These children are not being challenged creatively or intellectually. They are learning to value the teachers ideas and creativity above their own. A more useful strategy in art education is to provide a real model or several different pictures of the object the child wants to create. If a child wants to draw a rabbit, he uses the school's pet rabbit as a model or the teacher finds pictures showing many rabbits from different angles for him to examine. She also may provide the materials the child wants to use such as clay, tempera paint, water colors, or other media, but she is careful to provide only as much help as is necessary. Teachers talk the child through the process providing hints, guidance, and technical pointers without becoming too directive or controlling. In this manner children feel ownership of both the process and the product. They develop pride in themselves and their mastery of various media increases.

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Many open-ended art activities should be provided. Art is not just a tool for the development of specific skills, but a powerful means of self-expression. Children enjoy and learn about the properties of different medium through experimenting. They savor the tactile sensations of clay, finger paint and play dough. Children who have experienced trauma can express the emotional impact of the event through drawing or painting. Growing up is fraught with emotionally intense, if not traumatic experiences, including separating from and losing loved ones, being alone, and dealing with new situations. The opportunity to use art media in undirected ways provides children with an important outlet for the expression of emotions and should be available often.

Performance

Some children love to perform for an audience while others feel pressured and frightened. The teacher individualizes when children choose how and to what extent to perform. She provides some guidance as to what they will perform - which character to portray, whether to sing or dance or recite a poem, and which song they will sing.

Culture figures prominently in performing. In some countries or cultures, performing is a common activity among children and adults of all age groups. At social gatherings individuals will sing, play an instrument, or dance for others. In other cultures, this is not a usual occurrence. Regardless of cultural norms, adults should have reasonable expectations for the ability level of children and respect any reluctance to perform.

There is also a developmental aspect to performing. Younger children are often less able, willing, and comfortable with performing, while older children often find it enjoyable.

Teachers and administrators should weigh carefully the advantage of performing as opposed to the disadvantages (pressures) placed on children. A list of alternatives to formal per-

formances in front of an audience are to:

- Put on complete productions without an audience.
- Put on complete productions for other children in the class.
- Enjoy music and dance without a performance.
- Involve all parents and teachers as participants in dances, drama, and sports.

Child-Centered Practice

Amelia and her assistants, Gerry and Susan, organize an event that promotes parent involvement as well as artistic skills and talent. Parents are invited in advance to come for dinner. At five o'clock, a father, who is a professional musician, arrives to play his accordion and sing with the children and teachers. He leads everyone in folk dances. Then he leads everyone downstairs to the music room where more parents are waiting. The children run to the door when they hear a knock. Gerry, dressed as a favorite folk hero of the children, enters carrying a large sack. The children recognize her as the character who lives on rooftops and steals pies. Gerry acts out part of the story with the children and parents who all choose the roles of various animals. When Gerry opens her sack, the children discover collage materials instead of pies.

The other teachers then set out large pieces of paper and jars of glue. Everyone, including parents, works in groups on the floor making collages. Next, Susan and Amelia, dressed in costumes of other folk characters, join Gerry and act out a short dramatic scene that fully involves all the children and parents in their animal personas. As part of the story, all the animals make a meal for the folk hero and themselves to share. This involves a cooking activity where small groups of adults and children cut up various vegetables at tables to make a traditional salad. Everyone eats. The evening ends with everyone dancing to several traditional songs. Children do their best according to their ages and experience. Some receive individualized help with the dance from a nearby adult.

This activity nicely integrates parent involvement, children's active participation in cultural activities, and the teaching of specific music and dance skills.

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It is natural for parents to want their own children to be accomplished and successful—possibly a little more than other children. However, this attitude causes parents to pressure children. It can lead children to dislike the very thing in which they are most interested. Parents and teachers must strike a balance between pressuring children to develop skills and talents and allowing them total freedom to express themselves. Healthy development depends on this balance. There are many ways to do this:

- Have fun with your child singing, dancing, playing music and sports to reduce the pressure to "perform." Have realistic expectations and refrain from critical assessments of your child's skills.
- Give your child many opportunities to use art materials, play games, and dance in an open-ended and creative way. Have no expectations for finished products and give no directions. Value creativity.
- Know your child and individualize accordingly. Some children love to perform and others dislike it. Do not put pressure on your child to perform if she dislikes it. Do provide opportunities for your child to perform if she enjoys it. Make sure your child is sufficiently challenged, but not overwhelmed with high expectations.
- Allow your child reasonable choices. Let him choose the instrument to play, the sport to which he is the most attracted, the part to play in the drama. Most people are good at what they enjoy and enjoy what they are good at.
- Make sure your child's teacher knows about your child's preferences and proclivities. Make sure that those adults who may give special lessons to your child (music, sports, dance) are kind and caring, have realistic expectations for your child, and are responsive to your child's personality and skill level.
- Value your child's individuality. Encourage his interests, styles, and preferences.

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CHAPTER 6

ENCOURAGEMENT OF POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

Teacher-Directed Practice

Two girls are playing in the family/dramatic play activity center. Sally wants a toy that Alma is using. Sally pushes Alma down while grabbing the toy and runs off with it to another part of the room. Alma is crying. The teacher, Joanne, sees this and says, "You should know better than to act like such a baby." Later in the day, Sally comes to Joanne with a sad look on her face and puts her arms up for a hug. Joanne says, "No hugs for you, little girl. I only give hugs to good children."

Such approaches to children's misbehavior do not help children learn better behavior. They also reduce children's sense of self-efficacy by making them feel humiliated and unworthy. Children who behave well should do so because they know how to get their needs met in positive, effective ways and because they feel capable, competent, and valuable. They do not want to control others or prove themselves better than others. They do not feel desperate for attention. They can manage their own impulses and can delay their needs for a short time. Therefore, the task for teachers is to develop these capacities in children who do not have them. Clearly, embarrassing, belittling, withholding love, or punishing does not help. In fact, these tactics almost always make things worse because the child feels more negatively about herself and also feels anger at the teacher.

Approaches to Positive Behavior

When a child exhibits negative behaviors on a regular basis such as defiance, physical or verbal aggression, cruelty, and self-abuse, the teacher needs to do three things at the same time:

- Determine possible root causes of the behaviors and begin the process of changing them (transformation).
- Create a classroom that is caring, responsive, supportive, and stimulating to prevent the need for children to exhibit challenging behaviors. Also change the physical environment to prevent the behaviors from emerging again (prevention).
- Intervene positively when the behaviors occur to change them and instill self-control and self-efficacy (intervention).

Transformation

There is a cause for all behaviors, although it sometimes can be difficult to determine the cause or causes. Children behave negatively for a variety of reasons including:

- The behavior works and the child gets what she wants, be it a coveted toy or attention.
- It is a habit which occurs often, is unconscious, accepted, or modeled at home and in the child's community.
- It is a way to express anger, fear, or other emotions. Even very young children have complex feelings, but they often cannot express them appropriately.
- There is lack of self-control for physical reasons such as poor nutrition or health, allergies, brain chemical imbalances, autism, or immaturity due to developmental delay.
- They feel very powerless and unimportant and must assert power often and intensely.
- They do not know a better way to get what they want or need.

The teacher works with staff, parents, and others to explore family or other circumstances that may be causing the challenging behaviors. To help Sally, the teacher should ascertain possible causes of behavior by talking with her parents (assuming this is common behavior for her). Rather than blaming parents, it is critical for her to approach them as partners. Utilizing the information parents provide, teachers and parents together identify a workable plan. Perhaps the reason she is angry is that she feels that she gets too little attention. Teachers and parents can decide together how best to help remedy this. Understanding possible causes for challenging behaviors should make the teacher more empathetic towards the child. Withholding love and other punishments are harmful to the child and do not help identify the causes of behavior. Empathy may be the single most important thing required to help the child.

Prevention

The most effective strategy for helping children with challenging behaviors is to empower them. They must have opportunities to make choices, to assume leadership and appropriate responsibility, to have a positive impact on others, to demonstrate competence, to receive individual attention, to be appreciated and supported, to be taken seriously, and to be given challenges. The teacher provides opportunities when she sets up a welcoming physical environment and an individualized daily schedule. Classroom procedures, routines, interactions, and responses to children must be warm and welcoming. Curriculum strategies that include positive, pro-social interactions (cooperative movement games) and practice in resolving conflicts (role plays, puppets) are extremely helpful. Positive interactions and negative behaviors are mutually exclusive.

When a child's behavior is challenging, it is a shrewd assumption on the part of the teacher that she might be at fault rather then the child. This is true even if the child's behaviors

are markedly different from all other children's behaviors in the class. Making this assumption is the first step to changing aspects of the classroom, the schedule, or ways of interacting or responding to this child. The best way (perhaps the only way) to change others is to change oneself. It is possible Sally feels that she has few opportunities or too little time to play with the toys that are most attractive to her. She grabs and pushes because she is both angry, impatient, and too young to have developed the ability to delay gratification. Young children often neither understand the feelings they have nor can they express them in words. It is best to determine the cause of Sally's behavior through careful observation and home visits. Then through trial and error make changes to help her. Such changes might include developing a fair way for sharing the toys that many children like or setting an amount of time each child can participate in popular activity centers.

Another prevention strategy is to make expectations very clear to children before they engage in an activity. The teacher prepares them to succeed rather than waiting for them to fail. As soon as free choice time begins, the teacher reminds Sally of what to do if she wants a turn with a toy.

Intervention

When a child misbehaves, many adults respond by punishing the child in some way. Unfortunately, this is the least effective and least likely way to help a child alter and improve her behavior. Punishments, such as verbally humiliating the child (saying that the child is dumb), physically hurting the child (slapping, pinching, poking), or taking away rights or privileges, are never a good response. Most children with challenging behaviors already feel demoralized and powerless. Punishments only reinforce those feelings and make behaviors worse rather than better. Punishments create an adversarial relationship between the teacher and child rather than create a relationship of trust which is what the child needs. Punishment also conveys the message to the child that the strongest,

loudest, or meanest person is always right, when the teacher wants to deliver a very different message: conflicts can be settled peacefully and no one person should have ultimate power over another.

The best intervention strategies, then, assume ignorance, and not malice on the part of the child. Teachers offer positive and productive ways to get needs met. They validate the child's feelings first and then help the child practice different behavior as often as necessary. Some children will require highly directive help. This takes time and effort, but there are no short cuts to changing behaviors.

The teacher should use many different intervention strategies because if one does not work, there are others to try. When she sees a child misbehave, she can analyze the situation based on her knowledge of the children involved and what occurred. She then responds with a strategy she thinks will work best. The more strategies teachers are familiar with, the more likely they are to find a successful one.

Validation of the Child's Needs and Feelings

In the situation with Sally and Alma described earlier, the first thing the teacher should do is validate the children's feelings. She should use statements such as, "I can see you really want the toy that Alma is using. I will help you get it, but I

won't let anyone hurt you and I won't let you hurt anyone." Statements of this sort are comforting to children who have a hard time controlling their impulses. Such communications inform the child that the teacher intends to help and is on the child's side. If the child knows the teacher is there to help her, she is much less likely to lie about what happened, run away, or not listen.

Self-Regulation

Before the teacher intervenes the child must be in a receptive emotional state. If the child is very upset, the teacher must first help her to calm herself. Children calm themselves in different ways: some respond when they are held gently and rocked; others respond when they sit near a teacher and listen to strong or soothing music; others respond when they look at pictures in a book by themselves; and others hold the teacher's hand and walk around until they are less upset. Some children will take longer than others to calm down. Teaching children how to calm themselves provides them an important skill in controlling impulse and anger that is needed throughout life. In the situation, it is Alma who will probably need to calm herself, although intervening to address the problem may produce the necessary effect.

Instruction of Effective Behavior

When a child misbehaves, the teacher should assume that the child does not know better. She should calmly teach the child a different and more effective behavior to achieve the same result. Even if the child does know better or is acting deliberately, this action avoids a power struggle between the teacher and the child. It also helps the child take responsibility for her actions by teaching her what she can do and how she can get what she wants.

Next the teacher might bring Sally and Alma together and say, "You both want to play with that toy and you both de-

serve to have it (validation of feelings and needs). I will help you. What can you both do to solve this problem without hurting each other? This has to be a safe classroom." The teacher offers as much help as necessary, but no more. She will offer more than one suggestion to some children and demonstrate what should be done, while to others she may provide only verbal encouragement. She might say, "Perhaps you can find a way to use the toy together or we can set the timer for three minutes and then take turns. Talk to each other and decide." The teacher remains with them to assist as necessary. Communication with both children is critical because one child may need help defending her needs and rights while the other child may need help learning how to solve the problem without being aggressive.

Redirection

This is a strategy where the teacher enables the child to get what she wants or do what she wants in an acceptable way. It is very similar to teaching the acceptable behavior, but it is more directive and immediate. It must closely match the actions and intentions of the child to work. A child who is throwing rocks outside can be given something else to throw or shown a safe place to throw rocks. However, when the child chooses to throw a rock at the object of her anger, then the teacher helps her find a more effective way to express her anger. For Sally, redirection might involve enticing her to use another toy. The problem with redirection in this situation is that it fails to teach Sally an alternative to aggression. Redirection can be an effective strategy for developmentally immature toddlers. It is also viable as a short-term solution when acceptable behavior can be taught at a more opportune time.

Natural Consequences

This strategy involves allowing the child to learn on her own from the consequences of her own behavior. This is diffi-

cult for most young children because they are only beginning to understand the relationship between cause and effect. However, it is a good idea to discuss or act out what happens so the child can hear or see the consequences of her actions. Natural consequences are more effective with older children (age seven or older), but even they may need the teacher to discuss what happened to fully understand how their behaviors led to specific consequences and what they might do differently the next time.

The teacher can tell Sally that when she takes toys from other children they will not want to play with her. The teacher might say, "There are ways you can play with the toys you want and still have other children like you. Let me help you do that. I'll pretend I'm Alma playing with a toy that you want. You can come to me and tell me that you would like to play with me or ask if I will trade a toy that you are using for the one I am using."

Withdrawal

The teacher makes certain that her attention is not inadvertently contributing to the inappropriate behavior. If the purpose of the behavior is to get attention or engage the teacher in a power struggle, attention may serve the purpose of the behavior. If the teacher senses this is what is happening, she should completely ignore the behavior, providing it is not dangerous. At a later time, when the child is less angry, she teaches a more acceptable way of getting her needs met (as described previously in Instruction of Effective Behavior). Also she should increase the amount of positive attention she gives Sally when she is not exhibiting negative behaviors.

Perhaps Sally is feeling frustrated because she has not received as much attention from the teacher as she would like because the teacher has been preoccupied. She knows that she will upset the teacher when she grabs a toy and pushes Alma. When she knows the teacher is watching, she does just that.

The teacher ignores this behavior for a few minutes. Then she plays with the toy she has taken from Alma. Eventually the teacher explains the effects of Sally's behavior and how Sally could have behaved differently. The teacher gives Sally positive attention when she behaves acceptably. This gives Sally the clear message that she can get the teacher's attention when she acts appropriately.

Child Choice

If the strategies discussed above fail, and the child is continuously disruptive, the teacher should ask her to choose a quiet activity away from others. However, before doing this the teacher might give her one more chance to improve her behavior. She states firmly what the child can do to remain in the activity and that if the disruption continues, the child will have to choose a different activity. The teacher may offer the child a choice of two or three activities. After the child chooses an activity, the teacher emphasizes that she can return to the first activity when she is ready to participate calmly. This approach acknowledges that the child is not able to engage in the activity at a certain time and gives her an opportunity to do something else. The teacher does not punish or humiliate Sally for what is beyond her control. If she does rejoin the original activity, the teacher welcomes her back with encouraging words and reminds her of the acceptable behavior.

Modification of the Environment

Sometimes an effective intervention strategy and an effective prevention strategy are one and the same. If children are usually running in the room, change the arrangement of the furniture to eliminate long, open spaces. If children are often fighting over toys there may not be enough toys. If children are unable to focus on their work, the classroom may be too open—shelves or furniture should be used to divide the space.

Obtaining or making more toys that are very appealing to Sally would be one way to adapt the environment to her.

Children with Extreme Behaviors

Some children exhibit challenging, even high frequency physically aggressive behaviors, so that an adult must remain with that child to keep the child under control. If it is possible to provide this without sacrificing the needs of all other children, then it is the ideal situation. If it is not possible or the behaviors are not improving, then the teacher needs to get help. A professional child psychologist should observe the child and meet with her parents to discuss the situation. A regular kindergarten is an appropriate place for a child with violent behaviors only when there is extra assistance in the classroom and a treatment program is in place with on-going support to the staff and parents from a mental health specialist.

PARENT PAGE

Parents are distressed by children's challenging behaviors—disobedience, lies, and temper tantrums. Many parents respond emotionally and harshly to these behaviors by hitting the child, taking away privileges, or making the child sit in a chair. But these responses are often ineffective and do not result in a long-term change. For the child to truly alter behavior, she must internalize a desire to control herself and to act in a different way. To instill this inner control, it is best to teach your child a more acceptable way to act rather than to punish her. You should take the following steps:

1. Attempt to understand the feelings and needs of your child. Ask yourself, "What is behind the behavior? What does the child want?"
2. Once you answer these questions, validate your child and her feelings. You might say, "I see you are frustrated and angry. It is okay to be angry, but I can not let you hurt anyone. I will not let you get hurt either."
3. Teach your child another behavior. You might say, "You can be angry, but I will help you find a way to express your anger more safely. Maybe you would like to hit this pillow or draw an angry picture." Allow your child to make alternative suggestions. Sometimes a "cooling-off" period is necessary before your child can be calm enough to listen and respond to your help. In this case help your child find a way to calm herself down by listening to music, looking at a picture book, or running outside.
4. Then try to get at the root of the problem. Help your child understand her anger or frustration. This may be a long and involved process and may require teaching your child some specific skills, such as how to negotiate turn-taking, or what words to use to express her needs or wishes.

Sometimes it is helpful to get assistance from friends, relatives, or professionals (from the child's teacher or the school psychologist) to solve problems between you and your child. Often, a neutral, third party can help you identify issues and help you come up with possible solutions. It is best to seek such aid sooner rather than later.

Avoid getting in a power struggle with your child. Remove yourself from the situation and deal with it when emotions are not so intense. Look for positive solutions. One result of following these recommendations is an enhanced respect between you and your child. An equally important result is that your child functions more completely in a variety of social situations and has the opportunity to practice new skills.

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CHAPTER 7

DEVELOPING HEALTHY HABITS

Teacher-Directed Practice

A group of three-and four-year-old children run inside the building after playing vigorously outside. They neatly hang up their coats and hats and go into the bathroom to wash their hands. The parent volunteer, Ana, has set the forks, spoons and napkins neatly at each child's place. The children sit and wait patiently as the adults give each child a bowl of soup. As the children receive the soup they pick up their spoon and begin to eat. An adult offers each child a piece of bread from a basket. As the children finish their soup, an adult removes the bowls and places a plate of rice and meat in front of them. Adults rotate through the tables assisting the children. The children eat very quietly and finish most of their food. A slice of apple is enjoyed for dessert. As the children finish their apples, they get up and go into the nap room to get ready for a nap. The adults pick up the dishes, wipe off the tables, and wash the dishes.

Meal Time

The situation described above reduces the opportunities for children to demonstrate initiative, self-efficacy, responsibility, self expression, and skill development. The behavior of the teachers fosters dependence and makes the children feel as if they are guests in an adult environment.

Eating is central to the child's life; preparing food and eating food influence the child's social and cultural life. Also, children establish life-long nutrition patterns early and these patterns should be healthy.

Meal time should be a pleasant, relaxed opportunity for children and adults to eat together and converse. Prior to the meal, adults should encourage children to do as much of the work for the meal as possible. Children feel independent and self-confident when they are allowed to take responsibility and to sometimes make mistakes.

Menu Selection

The food served to children should be as fresh as possible and as varied as possible. Many programs work with a local dietitian or nutritionist to ensure that the proper categories and amounts of food are served during the day. For example, in programs which the children attend for twelve hours a day, most dietary requirements should be met during the school day. If there are regulations that effect the nutrition program, the kindergarten staff should work with the appropriate officials to make the menus as healthy as possible.

The teacher should discuss menus with families at a parent meeting and place the menu for the week on the parent bulletin board to inform families of what their children are eating during the day. Teachers should encourage families to talk with district or state officials if they are concerned about the quality or quantity of food provided. For example, some programs have negotiated permission from the state to use funds to purchase staples (oil, flour, fresh meat, and vegetables) and develop healthier menus with a dietitian.

Preparation for Meal Time

Children should have jobs in the classroom. Jobs assigned to the children at meal time may include setting places (plates, bowls, eating utensils, napkins, cups or glasses) for each person, carrying food to the tables, and clearing and washing the tables. Children learn much from doing chores at meal time. They practice their counting skills and one-to-one correspondence thinking. If placemats with names are used, children

recognize names, and correctly set plates, cups, napkins, and utensils at each person's place.

Whenever possible, the classroom should have child-sized utensils including spoons, forks, knives, small serving spoons, plates, bowls, cups, and serving dishes, so the children can handle them easily. If this is not possible, the teacher allows children to use and carry the adult-sized items. If well-made plastic items are available, they can be dropped without breaking.

Encourage children to contribute to the classroom and meal time. Children feel productive and helpful when they can. These feelings enhance their self-esteem and promote independence. Children are proud to be the "helper of the day." In many classrooms the teacher creates a job chart with assignments of jobs for several children. Sometimes helpers wear aprons or child-size "cook hats."

Parents often express their surprise at how well children help with meals and how easily the children can use utensils and handle dishes. Once the children have learned to help during meal time at school, they want to help at home, too. One mother said, "I was so surprised that he wanted to help in the kitchen."

Participation in Meal Time

Serving family-style is a good way to encourage participation. This means that children and adults (teachers and visiting adults) all sit together, pass the food, and serve themselves.

It is a very important time for both adults and children when they can sit together and talk about the food and the events of the day. Adults can help pass and serve food if necessary. Adults should not stand over the tables to supervise, but rather they should sit with the children at the tables.

Adults can lead a meal time conversation by asking the children questions about their day. Adults might ask, "What was your favorite activity today?" or, "Where do you think oranges grow?" or, "Does anyone remember what we saw on our walk this morning?" Open-ended questions allow the children to talk and discuss in an easy manner. Meal time conversation should be comfortable for everyone.

New foods should be introduced slowly, one at a time. Children should not be forced to eat unfamiliar foods. Encouragement to taste and try new food should be provided. While some children enjoy trying unfamiliar foods, others are more timid. Children will notice others enjoying new foods and may feel comfortable trying a small taste. The teacher should respect these differences, while gently encouraging the children to taste new foods.

Children eat different amounts. Some children eat very quickly and others take their time and eat slowly. These differences should be allowed and encouraged. Children who finish first should be allowed to clean up their place and read a book or play quietly. Others may eat more helpings of food or eat at a slower pace or simply take more time to finish their food.

Adults should not feed children. Even the youngest children can feed themselves. If children do not want to finish their food, they must not be forced to eat. When adults demand that children eat or feed them, it is counterproductive. Children know when they are not hungry any more. Adults can assist by watching the amount of food children put on their plates and encouraging them to take small portions. If they are still hungry, they should be allowed to take more food.

Child-Centered Practice

Lunch time arrives. Two children set the table while the others wash their hands. Teachers, parents, and children all sit down together to eat. Each person helps himself to food as it is passed around the table. Occasionally, an adult helps serve the food. Children and adults talk about the goat that came to visit them in the morning. As each child finishes, he picks up his plate and utensils and puts them on the lunch cart. Then he selects a book to read. When everyone has left the table, the children who have jobs as clean-up helpers clear the dishes and wash and dry the tables.

Use of the Toilet

Teacher-Directed Practice

Children are working in small groups. After the children finish putting the materials away, the teacher assistant says, "Children, it's time to go to the bathroom." All the boys and girls line up to use the toilet. When each child is through using the toilet, she goes to the sink and washes her hands. If a child need assistance, she asks an adult to help her. When all the children are done washing their hands, they all return to classroom activities.

This situation describes a non-individualized approach to toileting. In this approach the needs of individual children are ignored. Also much time is wasted waiting and lining up, time that could be better spent in active learning through play.

The procedures governing the use of the toilet room will vary from classroom to classroom. At the beginning of the year teachers should show children how to use the toilets and give a lesson on hand-washing. It is ideal to have toilets easily accessible to each classroom, so children feel free to use the toilets when needed. Toileting is an individual matter; the teacher should permit the children to use the toilet when it is necessary. If children need to use the toilet during nap time, lunch

time, outdoor time, or classroom activity time, they should know that they can get up quietly and use the toilet. Children should not be required to ask the teacher's permission to use the toilet. However, they should tell the teacher where they are going. Children should know that an adult is close in case they want help. Younger children may require more assistance than older children with buttons, zippers, and snaps.

It is ideal to have child-sized commodes with seats on the commodes. If these are not always available, it is a good idea to make sure that children can reach the toilet by providing a step stool or block. If there are no toilet seats, children learn to squat on the edge of the toilet. Children may need assistance until they learn how to balance correctly.

Some toilet facilities may be old and children may be frightened to go into the room alone. Some of the facilities may be rusty and leaky. For example, when a child uses the pull handle, the tank leaks water on him and he is then afraid to use the toilet again. In cases like this, the teacher may want to accompany the child to the toilet and assist him until he feels comfortable. The toilets should be kept in good repair and the rooms well lit.

Depending on the facilities, location of the classrooms, and number of children, the teacher decides the best procedures for using the toilets. Children should be encouraged to be as independent and self-sufficient as possible.

Sometimes even five-and six-year olds will soil themselves. Teachers can attend to accidents in a quick matter-of-fact way with a clean change of clothes and understanding words. It is imperative to keep an extra set of clothes handy for emergencies. The teacher should never shame or ridicule a child. Her words are accepting and comforting. If such incidents continue on a regular basis, the teacher should discuss them with the family. A physician or other professional may need to see the child. However, infrequent soiling is normal and should be treated as such.

Issues of privacy and modesty may differ from community to community and child to child. At about age six, in many cultures, a sense of modesty may emerge and children may not be as comfortable using the common bathrooms as they were at an earlier age. Parents and teachers follow the children's lead and allow them to make decisions.

Child-Centered Practice

Children use the toilet as needed throughout the day. When Tanya comes out of the toilet area, the teacher asks, "Did you remember to wash your hands, Tanya?" Tanya squeals, "Oh, I forgot," and dashes back in to wash. The teacher notices another child playing at the water table and moving in a way that indicates that he needs to use the toilet. She says to him, "If you want to use the toilet, go ahead. I'll hold the toy fish for you until you are done."

Nap Time

Teacher-Directed Practice

All children are required to stay in their beds for the entire nap time. Andres, who recently turned six years old, never sleeps. The teacher tells him, "If you make noise and move around, you will not play outside after nap time."

The amount of sleep a person requires varies greatly. Some children sleep during the day, some only rest, and others need to take a short nap. The classroom program and schedule must accommodate these individual differences.

Many classrooms have sleeping rooms with permanent beds used only for rest time. Others use cots that are unstacked and interspersed throughout the classroom during rest time. Either way, the teacher should accommodate the children who do not want to sleep or who will sleep only for a short time.

It is a good idea that all children have a short, quiet period during the day. Children who are active in a classroom all day benefit from some time to relax and rest. The teacher allows the children who only want to rest to get up after a short time. They may look at books, draw, play with puzzles or engage in other quiet activities. Rules regarding nap time should establish where children can play if they do not sleep. As a rule, younger children will require more rest than older children.

Some children may have trouble calming down before they can rest. Staff can assist this transition by playing soothing music, singing a song, reading a story, rubbing the child's back, positioning cots and beds far enough away from each other, darkening the room, and having families bring blankets, toys or other sleeping aids from home (Saifer, 1990).

Teachers often express the concern that if one child gets up to play then they all will. Allowing children choices and helping them learn when their bodies need rest is part of teaching personal responsibility. Some days children may get up and play because their friends are playing. On other days they will choose to rest because they are tired or they want to read quietly.

Child-Centered Practice

Tomi rests on his bed for forty-five minutes, looking quietly at books. While others are sleeping, he gets up and plays with puzzles and draws. Occasionally, he and a teacher have a quiet conversation for a few minutes. He helps the teacher cut some paper. Soon the other children wake up and Tomi joins them in wake-up exercises.

Use of the Right or Left Hand

Teacher-Directed Practice

A small group of three-and four-year-old children are coloring with crayons and markers at a table. Marsha uses her left hand and three other children are drawing with their right hands. The teacher assistant walks over to Marsha. She removes the crayon from Marsha's left hand, and places it in her right hand and says, "Color with this hand." Marsha looks at her questioningly and struggles to draw the picture with her right hand. When the teacher walks away Marsha switches the crayon to her left hand and continues to color.

There are many myths about "handedness." These myths usually involve the idea that using the right hand for writing and drawing is the "correct" or "right" way. Sometimes parents and teachers force children to use their right hand thinking that being right-handed is preferable. Actually, this practice only creates anxiety in the child and tension in the relationship between the adult and child.

During the early years of development, children explore and use both hands to complete daily tasks, but hand dominance is genetically determined. Usually, by about the age of four, hand preference has been established, but some children continue to use both hands well.

Children should be allowed to use the hand for which they have a natural proclivity. Switching the crayon from the left to the right hand or punishing a child for using the left hand is very demeaning and traumatic for a child. Handedness is a characteristic unique to each person. Many people are ambidextrous (can use both hands equally) and there are others who use their left hand as the dominant hand. All of these options are acceptable and it is important to allow a child to use and strengthen the hand that he or she has a natural tendency to use.

Child-Centered Practice

The classroom is busy with activity. Children are drawing, painting, cutting, and throwing balls. Many children use only their right hands, while a few use their left, and some switch from the right to the left. The teachers and parents accept the natural hand dominance of each child. Teachers show left-handed children how to perform tasks such as throwing the ball, cutting, and drawing with their left hands.

Comfort Habits

Teacher-Directed Practice

Five year old Kate quietly rests during nap time. She is curled up with her thumb in her mouth. The teacher takes Kate's thumb out of her mouth and scolds, "You are too old to be sucking your thumb. You are a big girl now." The child takes her thumb out of her mouth and begins to whimper softly.

Life for a small child can be confusing, scary, frustrating, and sometimes overwhelming. Children naturally develop habits which comfort and calm them. These habits are not necessarily bad and can provide an effective way to feel safe and secure. Comfort habits may include finger-or thumb-sucking or clinging to a favorite toy or blanket.

Thumb-or finger-sucking is very natural for babies. Some babies are known to suck their thumbs in the womb. After birth, babies may suck their thumbs to relax themselves and provide tension release. It is one of the first repetitive actions a baby makes. Often around the age of three or four, children will give up sucking their thumb spontaneously, no longer needing this type of comfort. Other children continue to use thumb-sucking as a form of security or comfort.

Many adults become overly concerned if a child sucks her thumb in the preschool years. Attempting to break the habit may make the child anxious. There are reasons the child is sucking her thumb and adults should eliminate these causes rather than force the child to stop thumb-sucking. The child may be overly tired, not included in activities, bored with the activities, or have a considerable amount of stress in her life. Teachers and parents should talk about the situation if they are concerned, and offer the child other ways to express her stress or alternate ways of comforting herself.

Techniques to discourage thumb-sucking, such as wrapping the child's thumb with cloth or putting foul-tasting spices on the child's thumb, should be avoided. These techniques bring too much attention to the habit and create anxiety in the child. Adults who have endured this treatment remember it as embarrassing and degrading.

Many adults are concerned that thumb-sucking will cause crooked teeth. This is not a worry until the child is about six years old. Even at six, the child would have to suck his thumb for several hours each day before misplacement would occur. If a five-or six-year-old child sucks her thumb or fingers occasionally to calm herself, there is no reason to be concerned.

These habits will eventually disappear and the child will learn other comfort habits. Allowing children to grow and change at their own pace shows respect for each individual child (Leach, 1995).

Child-Centered Practice

Kate is curled up on her cot with her thumb in her mouth. The teacher has talked with Kate's mother about her thumb-sucking. They have agreed that it is all right for her to suck her thumb when she goes to sleep. The other children have noticed this behavior and have made fun of Kate. The teacher's response to the children is that some children need a stuffed animal to help them sleep, some need a back rub, some suck their thumb, and some need a story read to them. As the year progresses, Kate asks to sleep with a stuffed animal and sucks her thumb less.

Attachment to Blankets and Other Comfort Objects

Teacher-Directed Practice

During a parent meeting a mother expresses concern that her five year old son, Mike, cries and cries when he has to leave his favorite blanket behind when he goes to school. His mother is concerned that his strong attachment to his blanket is unnatural or unhealthy, but her son becomes too upset without the blanket and she hates to see him cry. Other parents express similar concerns. The teacher says that he will stop missing the blanket after a while, and that the parents should not worry.

Sometimes around the age of one, children adopt a particular object which has to be with them at all times. These objects are often called "transitional comfort objects" (Leach, 1995). Stuffed animals, crib blankets, and old diapers can be used. These objects function as security objects when parents are absent. One expert states, "Most authorities believe that cuddlies are beneficial to a young child. None believe that their

use is a sign of insecurity or any other difficulty." (Leach, 1995, p. 330).

The concerns expressed by parents and teachers regarding comfort objects are similar to their concerns regarding thumb-sucking. Many adults think that children should outgrow this behavior by preschool. However, each child is different and his or her emotional needs are unique and change from time to time. It is most important for teachers and families to observe when these objects are used and to determine why they are being used.

As with thumb-sucking, removing the comfort object or coercing a child to stop the behavior can cause him emotional distress. The teacher should allow the child to bring a comfort object to the classroom as long as it does not interfere with her activities. Children can do puzzles and draw and paint with their favorite object wrapped around them or close by. From her observations of the child, the teacher knows when the object is most needed and offers the child other forms of comfort precisely at those times. A child may sit on her lap or may touch her arm, or occasionally stay close to a child during a new activity.

Child-Centered Practice

Since many parents were concerned about their child's attachment to a blanket and several about thumb-sucking, the staff at the school invited a psychologist to speak at the next parent meeting. Families and staff members were able to ask questions and they learned that attachment to objects was normal. They also learned how to observe the children and to make sure they were feeling safe and secure. Some children continued to bring blankets to school, while most eventually left them at home.

Separation From Parents

Teacher-Directed Practice

It is nine o'clock on a sunny morning one month after school has opened. The classroom is buzzing with activity and most children are busy working in the activity centers with their friends. A sobbing Mary is sitting in a chair with her head on the table. The teacher pats Mary on the back, and goes back to the other children. Mary continues to cry for approximately fifteen minutes without anyone saying anything to her. When a visitor asks the teacher why the child is crying, the teacher says, "She is new and is just getting use to the classroom."

Fear of separation affects all children. It is very painful for many small children to leave their families and go to school. Children have trouble separating from their parents and need reassurance from the adults in the classroom. Being left alone to adjust by themselves or being made fun of only increases their distress. Children need to know that their parents will

return and that they will be cared for while their parents are away.

When a child has difficulty separating from his or her parents, the teachers and parents should cooperate in finding ways to reassure the child. Depending on their level of security, it is important to remember that all children may experience separation problems from time to time.

Some suggestions for addressing separation behavior include:

- Asking the parent to stay with the child for a short time each day as the child gets acquainted with the class and the children.
- Make sure parents say good-bye and tell the child when they will return.
- Finding out about toys and activities that the child is interested in and having them available when the child arrives.
- Providing extra attention and nurturing as the child adjusts to the environment.
- Providing time for the child to express feelings through drawing or talking with a trusted adult or "best friend."
- Allowing the child to bring a favorite toy or object from home.
- Most essential is to provide a secure and nurturing environment for all children.

Child-Centered Practice

Mary arrives at school crying and upset. She does not want to be left at school and wants her father to stay with her. The teacher asks the father to stay for a while and to reassure his daughter that he will be back at six o'clock. They draw two pictures together and the father takes one to work and Mary keeps one in her pocket until Daddy comes to get her. Mary continues to cry after her father leaves. The teacher softly repeats what her father has told her, "Daddy will be back at six o'clock. It is hard when Daddy leaves." After comforting Mary, she helps her get involved with children playing with blocks.

This chapter focuses on only a few of the ways to promote healthy habits in children. Allowing children to make choices, listening to children, assisting children to express their full range of feelings, considering children as individuals, and teaching children self-help skills promote both physical and mental health.

PARENT PAGE

In school we encourage children to be as independent as possible. We have "helpers" each day who set the table before meals and clean the table when we are done. These jobs rotate from child to child, giving each child a chance to feel helpful and needed.

We encourage children by teaching self-help skills. Some of these skills include putting on coats, boots, mittens, zipping coats if possible, setting the table, and using the toilet when necessary. We want children to know that they can take care of themselves.

We understand that children need support and that sometimes they are uncomfortable or scared. We know that children cannot always express their feelings in words, so their feelings are often expressed through their behavior. Sometimes children need an object (thumb, toy, blanket) to comfort them. We understand this and allow them to keep these objects. We determine why the children are feeling insecure or uncomfortable. Please feel free to spend time with your child in the classroom, until he feels more secure.

At home you can help your children become more independent and confident by:

- Asking them to help set the table at meal times.
- Allowing them to take food from serving platters by themselves.
- Working with them to do simple cooking.
- Encouraging them to use the toilet independently.
- Not getting overly upset if they have an infrequent toileting accident.
- Taking children to a doctor if accidents are happening often after age five.
- Not overreacting if your child sucks his thumb or has a favorite blanket or toy. Ascertain what may be causing the child to be a little insecure.
- Allowing them to choose which hand they want to use and never forcing children to change hands.
- Feel free to help your child adjust to a new situation by staying with her at the classroom until she is comfortable.

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CHAPTER 8

COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN, PARENTS, AND OTHERS

Teacher-Directed Practice

Immediately upon arriving at school, Jane's mother tells Peggy, the teacher that napping causes Jane to fall asleep very late at night and, therefore, Jane is tired and irritable in the mornings. Peggy, unsure of what to say, does not respond. Later that day at nap time, Jane is very tired and quickly falls asleep. When Jane's mother comes to pick her up at five o clock, Peggy tells her that Jane was so tired she had to let her sleep. Jane's mother is angry and says to Peggy, "I told you not to let her nap and you agreed." Peggy replies with annoyance, "I cannot force a tired child to stay awake." Peggy walks away from Jane's mother and attends to the needs of another child.

Open and effective communication among teachers, children, and parents is vital to educational programs which prepare children to function in a democratic society. Certain aspects of open and effective communication, whether among parents, children, co-workers, or others, are key. The teacher, as a leader and an authority figure, must strive to incorporate these components as fully as possible into her dealings with others. In this way she both reinforces the skills and attitudes which should permeate a democracy and creates a democratic environment.

Components of Communication

Two-way

There is equal and ready access among the communicators. A child or parent can as easily talk to a teacher as the teacher to them.

Mutual Respect

Even if there is disagreement, the communicator has a high regard for the humanity of the other person. Adults talking about children in front of them as if they do not hear or are absent communicates great disrespect. Instead adults should either refrain from such discussions altogether or invite children into the conversation.

Deep Listening

When someone speaks, the listener should focus intently on what is being said. She is not formulating a response or thinking about something else.

Active Listening

The listener should make eye contact, look attentive, nod occasionally, and if she is not certain of what she is hearing, repeat back what she thinks was said. Occasionally, she indicates interest by saying "yes" or "I understand," and asks clarifying questions.

Openness

Each communicator tries to see things from the other person's perspective. This is reflected in body language such as leaning forward to listen, getting down to the child's eye level, and making one's tone of voice warm and friendly.

It is also important not to respond defensively to others. If a communicator is told something with which she disagrees or if she is accused or defamed, defensiveness will only make matters worse. (See Communication in Difficult Situations for specific alternatives to responding defensively).

Understanding

There is a mutual understanding of the meaning of what is said even if the exact words or expressions are not clear. Often young children, because they are in the process of developing language and social skills, will say something other than what they really mean. A child who says, "I hate you teacher!" might be trying to say, "You do not pay enough attention to me. I need more affection from you." True understanding is reached when teachers respond to meanings rather than overt expressions.

Commitment

Each communicator makes a commitment to the other to take the time and effort needed to communicate by asking questions and restating points until mutual understanding is reached.

Variety

Good communicators will use verbal and auditory, written, graphic, tactile, and other forms of communication. A note to parents about an upcoming event will be accompanied by a verbal reminder and a notice on the wall with a picture.

Avoidance of Assumptions

Communicating takes constant practice. Miscommunication can happen easily and often. Good communicators repeat their communication, ask for feedback, ask the speaker for clarification, check later to see if the other person's actions match what was said, and never assume that they are fully understood, especially on the first attempt.

Directness and Conciseness

Each speaker takes responsibility for saying clearly and concisely what he needs to say in a nonthreatening manner. Rather than harboring anger or resentment or talking to others about a concern, adults talk to the person directly using

"I" statements. An "I" statement begins with "I" and asserts what the person feels without blaming or accusing the other person. For example, if a co-worker comes in late often, an effective statement would be, "I feel that I have to do more work and take more responsibility than I can handle when you are late. This makes me resentful and frustrated." Now open, honest, and two-way communication is more likely to occur, leading toward a resolution of the problem.

Positive Communication with Young Children

The teacher's actions must be consistent with her words. It is often best to act and talk at the same time, avoiding long lectures or discussions. If a child is throwing blocks, it is usually effective to gently assist her to build with the blocks while emphasizing, "You can build with them." This illustrates another aspect of good communication with children: positive statements. Tell the child what he can do rather than what he should not do. Rather than telling a child not to run in the room, politely ask him to walk and tell him why.

The teacher's body language and tone are more important than the words she uses. She gets at eye level with the child when she speaks to him and looks him in the eyes. She talks to him as she would an adult without affecting an overly sweet tone of voice. She avoids critical, annoyed, or angry tones in her voice and uses warm, caring expressions to build a trusting relationship. The teacher employs a variety of voice tones to command attention and develop rapport with the children. Suddenly speaking softly is often better for getting children's attention than speaking loudly.

The teacher should engage in conversations with children. Sometimes teachers have a tendency to quiz children or talk at them rather than talking with them. Teachers will often ask children many closed questions. That is, questions that have only one "right" answer and questions to which the teacher already knows the answer. However, language development and emotional health are best fostered through discussion and dialogue. The teacher should share information about herself, her childhood, her family, and her life outside of school so that when she asks children about themselves, the questioning occurs in the context of two-way communication. When she does question the children, she should ask mostly open-ended questions. These are questions to which she does not already know the answer. These are questions that have many possible answers—none necessarily right or wrong. These questions usually begin with phrases such as, "Tell me about...?, How do you feel about...?, I am interested to hear what you think about ...?, What have you noticed about...?, Why do you think...?" In classrooms where teachers use more open-ended questions rather than closed, and engage in real conversation with children, they achieve higher levels of language development and critical thinking.

The teacher gives specific feedback rather than praise or criticism; she strives to take evaluative judgments out of her comments. This creates a more open and safe emotional climate in the classroom. If a child works long and hard at pick-

ing up the blocks and putting them back on the shelf, an effective response might be, "Thank you for working so hard to make our classroom neat. It will be easy to find and use the blocks later."

She uses words to communicate that the classroom belongs to everyone and that all share in making it a community. If a teacher says, "Please pick up these papers for me," the child may infer that the classroom is the teacher's environment. If she says, "Let's pick up these papers together," she communicates that it is a shared space belonging to everyone in the class.

One of the most important roles of the teacher is to facilitate communication between children. In a sense the teacher acts as an interpreter, making sure that children understand each other when they attempt to communicate. Sometimes this simply requires restating what one child has said to another, so the words are understood (this is especially true for children in the class who have poor articulation). At other times it may require her to mediate a conflict between children. This could involve preventing children from hurting each other while discussing a grievance, helping them find the best words to express themselves, teaching them negotiation skills, and observing the results of the resolution. Teachers also provide many opportunities for children to talk with each other and with the adults. A quiet classroom does not promote good language development and positive social relations or good mental health. A reasonably noisy one does.

Communication in Difficult Situations

Kindergarten teachers and staff come in contact with many people during the course of a given day. Some difficult situations are bound to arise and some people are undoubtedly more difficult to communicate with than others. Some parents, coworkers, supervisors, and children will be aggressive, angry, withdrawn, or manipulative (use indirect methods to get what

they want).

One good strategy to deal with the difficult behaviors of others is not to respond at all at first. This gives the teacher time to think about the best response to elicit more information and to allow her own hurt or anger to dissipate. She might say something like, "Let me think about what you said." She may ask to talk further with the person at a later time in a place more conducive to good communication. She should use the "I" statement strategy discussed previously when this meeting occurs.

If the teacher is concerned about what another person says or does, she should approach that person from a problem-solving vantage point. She should work together with the person to solve the problem assuming that is appropriate. For example, she might say, "I would like your views on some thoughts I have had. I watched you and your son in a struggle yesterday and I wonder if you would like some ideas about how I think this could be avoided in the future." This is a far better way to begin a dialogue than to criticize the parent. The teacher asks permission to address her concerns instead of assuming her advice is wanted. Rather than only expressing complaints or concerns, she enters into a dialogue with some ideas for solving the problem.

When a parent is angry about something, it is best to acknowledge this feeling and to be empathetic. A person's feelings are always valid, even if the complaint is not. A teacher might say, "I'm sorry this happened. I can see you are upset and I will do everything I can to help solve this problem. I would be upset, too, if my child's sweater was lost for the second time in a month." The teacher should ask the parent for her ideas about solving the problem and end the discussion with a summary of any agreement reached. Then the teacher follows-up, later informs the parent of what she has done to solve the problem, and together they determine whether further action is necessary.

If the teacher is blamed or accused of something she has not done, it is best to start by accepting responsibility. Denial of responsibility only makes the other person more upset. She assures the person that she will do all she can to solve the problem or not behave this way again. At a later time, when mutual trust and respect is re-established, she may want to deal with the real issue underlying the problem.

In some very difficult situations, it may be to everyone's benefit to involve a neutral third person to facilitate communication between the teacher and the person with whom the conflict exists. This third person should be skilled at mediation.

Child-Centered Practice

In the morning Jane's mother tells the teacher, Peggy, that she would like Jane not to take a nap. Napping means Jane will be up late at home and tired and irritable in the mornings. Peggy says to Jane's mother, "I understand the problem because I had the same problem when my son was little. But if Jane is tired at nap time, it is difficult for me to keep her awake. I think we need to discuss this further, but now is a bad time." Jane's mother responds, "Can we talk about this at five o'clock when I come to pick her up and in the meantime just do the best you can?" Peggy says, "It sounds fine to me. Let's both think of ways to solve this dilemma before we meet again."

At five o'clock, Peggy has arranged for a parent and the methodologist to stay with the class, so there will be enough adults with the children while she meets with Jane's mother. At the beginning of the meeting Peggy apologizes that she could not keep Jane awake during nap time and asks Jane's mother if she has any ideas. They discuss various ways to deal with the problem and finally agree on a strategy. Peggy will try to wake Jane up a little earlier each day for two weeks. During these two weeks, her mother will try to get Jane to bed a little earlier each day. They agree to meet again in two weeks to evaluate their plan and amend it if necessary.

PARENT PAGE

Effective and sufficient communication between you and your child and between you and your child's teachers is vital to healthy growth and development and is a necessary part of educational programs which prepare children to carry out their civic responsibilities. Communication leads to understanding and insight, to people really hearing and listening to each other, and this in turn leads children to internalize the principles of democracy. Your child's teachers can use the information you provide to better work with your child. Basic principles of good communication include:

- **Active Listening** Make eye contact, nod, repeat back what was said to make sure you understand properly, and ask clarifying questions.
- **Commitment** Willingly take all the time necessary to work hard at communicating so mutual understanding is reached.
- **Variety** Use many different strategies to communicate, such as nonverbal, written, visual, and tactile.
- **Directness and Conciseness** Say what is on your mind, express how you feel without blaming others. Use "I" statements, such as "I worry when you don't speak to me, because I think something is wrong" as opposed to, "It is rude not to talk and it makes me angry."

Your actions must be consistent with your words. It is often best to act and talk at the same time, avoiding long lectures or discussions. If a child is throwing blocks, it is usually effective to gently assist her in using the blocks to build with while saying, "You can build with them." Positive statements are another aspect of good communication; tell children what they can do rather than what they should do. Engage in conversations with children rather than quiz them or talk at them. Avoid asking children many closed questions, that is, questions that have only one "right" answer and to which the teacher already knows the answer. However, language development and good emotional health are best fostered through discussion and dialogue.

Give specific feedback rather than offering praise or criticism. This creates a more open and safe emotional climate. If a child works long and hard to pick up toys, an effective comment might be, "Thank you for working so hard to make our house look neat." This is better than saying, "good boy" which is evaluative.

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CHAPTER 9

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Teacher-Directed Practice

At seven o'clock, dozens of young children and their mothers and fathers walk to the local kindergarten. They arrive at the door, kiss good-bye, and the children go into the classroom. They go to school for the day and the parents go to work. At the end of the day the children meet their parents at the door and walk home with them telling them about the events of the day.

Modern democracy means including citizens in decision-making rather then excluding them. One of the main tenets of a high quality kindergarten program is to involve the families, and therefore communities, in the program. According to an old African adage, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." It is important to involve the whole community in the growth and development of its children.

Parent involvement is an essential aspect of the program and is encouraged in several ways:

- Information is shared with families so they are knowledgeable about the goals and objectives of the program.
- Daily and weekly activities are posted.
- Parent meetings, conferences, and home visits are scheduled.

- Family members are invited and welcomed in the classroom at any time.
- A family advisory committee is formed.

The kindergarten program will reflect democratic values when parents and staff members communicate and share information while respecting each other's positions and opinions. As in all democratic systems, there are responsibilities and duties on everyone's part. Families must be aware and informed about the goals, objectives, and expectations of the program. Staff have the obligation to share as much information as possible with them and make time to answer their questions and concerns. Staff have the obligation to understand the diverse needs of children and the circumstances of each individual family.

Strategies for the Involvement of Families

There are many ways to communicate with families and involve them in the program. Using a wide variety of strategies usually works well and meets the needs of the diverse families in your program.

Drop-off and Pick-up Times

Even though these are busy times of the day, many teachers say that the best time to talk with families is in the morning when the children are dropped off, and in the afternoon, when the children are picked up. The teacher makes families feel welcome in the building and classroom by talking about the day's activities and discussing successes or concerns and ideas for meetings or events. This is possible because children are dropped off at different times and teaching assistants can help greet children if parents want to briefly talk with the teacher. Families have time to talk with other parents, ask the staff questions, request a meeting, sit down for a snack, play with their children, or read to a group of children. This allows parents to exchange and receive information in an informal and relaxed manner.

The teacher schedules the first and last half hour of the day as free time during which children and their families can play and work together. This time becomes part of the daily schedule and a regular part of the school day. She greets all family members and offers them an opportunity to share ideas and hear information about the program and their child. As families become more comfortable in the program, they can be encouraged to stay and work in the classroom or parent room, bring snacks, and fix broken toys and equipment.

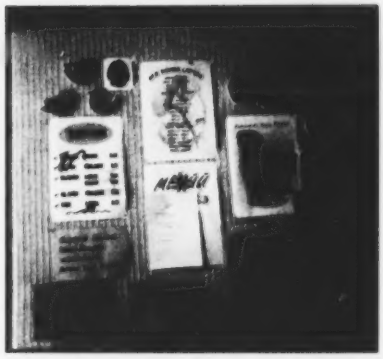
Notes and Notebooks

Sending an informal note home with a child also can facilitate connections between the teaching team and the family. The notes, short and very specific, describe an accomplishment, a new skill or behavior, or thank families for something they did for the program. Families appreciate hearing from the teacher and can be encouraged to send notes back to the teaching team.

This is particularly effective if the teachers and parents are working on a specific goal with a child. For on-going communication, notebooks that go back and forth between the school and home are effective. This is a good way for families and the teaching staff to communicate, especially if family members have limited time or do not have phones or prefer to express themselves in writing. Simple notebooks, decorated by the child, are carried back and forth by the child or family member. This technique works well for families who are comfortable putting their thoughts and ideas in writing, but some families prefer other methods of communication.

Bulletin Boards

Bulletin boards are another way to convey information informally to families. Information on bulletin boards can be directed specifically to parents and include notices of meetings, flyers on child development or other relevant subjects, information on the schedule for the day, a sign-up sheet for volunteers, and instructions for volunteers.



Also, bulletin boards can demonstrate to families what is going on at school. The teacher can fill the bulletin boards with displays of children's art, stories about field trips, and photographs of children's family members or pets. Creative bulletin boards give a sense of the atmosphere and activities of the classroom. The teacher should ask families to contribute to the bulletin boards. In one program, a father, who is an artist, came to the classroom and drew with the children and put the group mural up on the bulletin board. All the children were excited and wanted their fathers to come to school also.

Information for families to borrow or read can be placed on bulletin boards. In one program a psychologist spoke at a parent meeting and left copies of a short article for parents. In another program, index cards with child-rearing tips were available on the board for families.

Newsletters

Newsletters or news sheets are another good way for teachers to communicate with families. Sending a newsletter home with a child on a bi-weekly or monthly schedule helps assure that all the families in the program receive consistent information. The intent and topics of the newsletters may vary, depending upon the other forms of communication.

A general format of newsletters is to describe school events and activities and suggest ways to encourage those activities at home. Other newsletters take a theme approach and discuss those activities and ideas which reinforce a particular theme such as fall or colors. Parents, family members, and community members are invited to contribute to the newslet-

ter. In one program, a mother, who is a doctor, wrote a short article on how to take care of routine childhood illnesses. Others can contribute recipes.

Newsletters should be short and easy to read. It is more effective to publish several brief newsletters throughout the year than to send out only one or two long ones. The newsletter should include the names of children and family members in the program as often as appropriate, and mention each child and family over time.

Home Visits

Home visits promote communication between school and home. The purpose of the visits vary, but it is usually to acquaint the teacher with the child, family members and pets, and the child's environment. The children very much enjoy it when the teacher visits their home.

Sometimes both the teachers and the families feel a little intimidated by the idea of a home visit. If the home visit is approached as a visit to the home of an acquaintance, and all the social rules associated with visiting someone in their home are observed, it will go smoothly. The children are usually very excited to have their teachers in their homes and will want time to show teachers their toys and valued possessions. The teacher may want to bring a toy for the child to play with while she talks with the family.

If families object to a home visit and make it clear they are uncomfortable having staff in their home, the teacher should respect their decision and meet with them at school. There may be a number of reasons for their objection and all must be respected. Establishing a relationship of trust with families is most important and, if a teacher works patiently to develop a good rapport with families, they may invite her to their home ultimately.

Home visits should be rewarding for both teaching staff and families. The family gets the personal attention of the teacher and sees how the teacher and child interact. The teacher

meets the family in their home and can discuss with them the individual child and her progress. If both the family and the teacher are clear about the purpose and intent of the visit, the visit can place the relationship on solid footing, which is more likely to continue throughout the year.

Family Advisory Committee

The family advisory committee is an active and vital part of the program. The committee is formed by family and sometimes community members. The purpose of the committee is to work together with the staff and advise them on issues that concern the program.

Everyone needs to fully understand the roles and responsibilities of the family advisory committee to avoid problems occurring. It should be articulated clearly at the beginning of the year which decisions are the responsibility of the committee to make and which decisions are the responsibility of the staff to make. It is also important to stipulate the issues about which the committee may only make recommendations. As is

customary in democratic structures, the advisory committee functions strictly in an advisory capacity and does not supervise the program. The staff, who manage the program, are expert in curriculum and early childhood development. Budget expenditures are often governed by contractual and legal obligations and are not within the purview of the committee.

Some of the responsibilities family advisory committees undertake include planning parties and events, raising money for field trips, planning and approving field trips, working with community members to contribute materials to the school, and organizing clean-up day for the school.

Parent Room

Each kindergarten should have an area designated as a parent room. These rooms are comfortable places for parents and families to read articles, books, magazines about children and parenting, talk quietly with staff and other parents, hold meetings, and borrow toys or books. Many programs have bins of clothing and toys that can be exchanged.

These rooms have a symbolic and substantive function. They symbolize both the importance of parents to the school community and provide a place where useful parental activities take place. Many parents are shy at first about coming to school because they view school as "the teacher's domain," a place inaccessible to parents. In some cases, parents will never have been allowed in school. However, once they are welcomed in the classroom, asked for their opinions and listened to, they become excited about being involved in the program. When the school applies the democratic principles of shared decision-making and provides them with information, the role parents play in the program becomes more vital. By sharing knowledge the school and the families establish a true partnership.

Families in the Classroom

Families are the primary educators of their children and have the most influence on them. By being involved in the program and helping in the classroom, both families and the program benefit. Family involvement varies with the circumstances of the family, other responsibilities, and work schedules. For example, some families may come and help in the classroom once a week, while others may send items to be used in the family activity center or help build equipment for the playground. Assisting in the classroom is an excellent way for families to be involved in the program.

When parents help in the classroom, they learn about classroom activities and how the children interact with materials and other children. Parental assistance greatly benefits the teachers in the classroom by enabling them to individualize more for each child. It is important to encourage family members to come to the classroom and help the teaching team for a number of reasons:

- Active and creative classrooms are fun and rewarding to be around.
- An extra adult can make it easier to individualize activities. It is easier to conduct a small activity in the science corner and one in the math area, if there are people to help.
- Special activities can be incorporated into the day such as baking, field trips, complex art projects, and parties.
- When families assist in the classroom, they better understand the goals of the program and the way in which

it works. By being part of the activities and seeing how independent the children are, families understand the value of a child-centered program. Many parents express amazement about the number of things the children can do by themselves.

- Activities which can be carried on at home are learned by assisting the teacher in the classroom.

Some family members may be reluctant to come to the classroom to help for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons they may be reluctant include:

- They are not sure they are really wanted.
- They are afraid they may make a mistake.
- They may not know what to do.
- They do not feel they have anything to offer.
- They are unclear about rules and procedures of the classroom.

Comfort Level of Families in the Classroom

Making families feel welcome in the school begins at the moment the teacher encounters them. The concept that families are active participants in their child's learning and know the most about their children is a message which must be conveyed in all communications. Respect and open communication regarding program policies, plans, procedures, goals, activities, and expectations of families foster a sense of belonging.

The classroom and the school sometimes intimidate families. Both need to be family-friendly. It is the responsibility of all staff members to encourage families to come to the classroom. At the beginning of the year, it is important to explain that parents are welcome to join the classroom activities any time they would like.

Place a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board, so families can sign up for a visiting time that fits their schedule. Families are not obligated to sign up for a specific amount of time.

Perhaps a parent can stop by during a lunch break or on the way to work for a little while to read a book or help in the block corner. Others may want to sign up to work a few hours each week or some may come every day.

Some programs have the "problem" of having too many adults in the classroom at one time. Parents and family members enjoy helping and have so much fun with the children that the room is crowded with adults. This "problem" can be taken care of with a sign-up sheet for parents. During a typical classroom day, the teacher, teacher assistant, and two parents is probably the optimal number of adults. If there are special activities or a field trip, more may be helpful.

Information for Parents in the Classroom

In a given day there are hundreds, if not thousands, of activities that go on in a preschool classroom. Families who come to help with the children are not expected to know exactly what to do. There are several strategies the teachers can use to put family members at ease.

It is a good idea for teachers to give visitors specific directions as to what they can do to be helpful that day. A note with the person's name on it can be posted on a bulletin board in the classroom or written directions placed somewhere in the activity center itself. The specificity of the instructions will depend on the degree of comfort and skill of the family member coming to the classroom and the activity.

Parents need to know general expectations and rules of behavior for their classroom. Examples of the kinds of directions parents need are:

- Participate in group activities. Sit with the children.
- Encourage children to dress and undress themselves, but assist them if needed.
- Do not interpret children's art work, block building or wood work by giving it a title. Ask the child, "Tell me

about what you made." Have him explain the work to you.

- Ask the teaching staff questions at any time.
- Use children's names, introduce yourself.
- Dress in appropriate clothes to be comfortable on the floor or outside with the children.
- Do not discuss the individual children with other adults, their parents or other family members. Speak to the teacher if there are comments, concerns, or questions. Do not discuss a child's behavior in front of him.
- Make ideas and suggestions known to the staff so they can use them in the classroom.
- Bring any special skill or talent you have to the attention of teachers so they can use them in the classroom.
- Know the discipline policy before beginning to work in the classroom. Ask the staff to explain what to do if children hit or get into fights with one another.
- Give children enough time to do things for themselves before offering to help or solve a problem.

When family members are invited to help with specific activities or events, they require specific directions and information. Family members are guests in the classroom and, like all guests, will feel better about helping if they know what is expected of them.

Appreciation and Recognition

Everyone likes to know that he is appreciated and the family members who come to the classroom are no different. They give their valuable time to contribute to the program and deserve to be thanked. Ideas for ways to recognize parents and other adults and make them feel comfortable include:

- Thanking each person for their assistance.
- Providing a place for helpers to sit and relax and put their personal belongings.

- Providing food so the helpers can enjoy eating with the children.
- Creating a bulletin board for helpers.
- Providing plaques or certificates of recognition.
- Planning a party in honor of everyone who made the program successful.

As discussed previously, some families will not be able to come to the classroom and participate with the children or are not interested in helping in this way. The teacher should remember that there are many types of involvement possible in the program. Sending books and materials, attending meetings, helping to build equipment, or clean up the outdoor area are also valuable contributions. If parents are uncomfortable coming alone, the teacher should connect them with a family that has been in the program a little longer and is more adjusted. Families communicating with families is a valuable method of introducing new people to the program.

An understanding of democratic processes develops when parents plan events together or vote on the destination of a field trip. Parents learn that democracy involves responsibility. They have an obligation to allow children to make choices and solve problems. Parents also need to allow their children to assume as much responsibility at home and to make mistakes.

Child-Centered Practice

At seven o'clock, children and their parents are arriving at school. Parents talk with teachers about the day's events. One father is playing a game with a group of children in the manipulative corner. A mother is talking to the teacher assistant about her child's health. Two parents are reading the bulletin board and other parents are checking toys out of the lending library. The classroom is filled with discussion and mutual respect. The day has begun!

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PARENT PAGE

As parents and family members, you know the most about your children. You live with them, watch them grow, teach them many things, and provide them with security. You are a very important part of your child's education and we want you involved in the program.

You are always welcome in our program. The children get very excited and happy when their family members visit. Please come and visit anytime you can. Stop by for a few minutes or a few hours. We always have things for you to do. If you only stop in for a few minutes when you drop off or pick up your child, that is fine. Our staff is always available to talk with you about your child. We want you to know what your child is learning and how she is feeling. We need information from you, too.

We think communication with families is very important. Some of the ways we will communicate include:

- Parent Bulletin Boards. A place to put written notices and messages. You can also put up advertisements or other information.
- **Notebooks**. A notebook that will be sent home with your child containing information about your child's progress. We invite you to send comments back in the notebook.
- Newsletters. A newsletter that will be sent home with your child containing information about program events, meetings, and other matters.
- Home Visits. Informal visits of teaching staff to your home at least twice during the year to see the child in her natural setting.
- Family Advisory Committee. An advisory committee comprised of parents elected from each classroom holds parent meetings frequently. The committee represents the families and assists the staff of the program to make decisions and plan for the program.
- Parent Meetings. Meetings which are open to all offer families the opportunity to gather as a group, discuss the program, have some fun, and learn about child development or other topics of interest.

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CHAPTER 10

THE TRANSITION TO PRIMARY SCHOOL

Teacher-Directed Practice

Kris is a kindergartner and will go to primary school in the fall. She loves books and is beginning to read. Her counting skills need improvement. She knows she will attend another school next year and worries about not having any friends there. Kris's parents are worried that her math skills will not meet the expectations of the primary teacher and have discussed this concern with the kindergarten teacher. Kris's parents and teacher would like more communication with the primary school teacher.

It is a difficult transition for both children and parents to go from a kindergarten which uses democratic principles to a more traditional primary school. In the kindergartens, children are encouraged to be self-directed and parents are welcomed as partners. Many traditional primary schools may still require unquestioning obedience to authority from children and set their learning goals for them. Parents may be discouraged from being involved.

Careful planning and preparation can help ease this transition. A major goal of transition planning is to ensure that the staff of kindergartens and the staff of the primary schools which the children will attend are knowledgeable about each other's philosophy, curricula, and expectations for children and families. Based on this knowledge, transition plans are developed to make the adjustment of the child and family easier.

Transition activities can include alerting the primary grade teacher to the strengths and needs of each child, encouraging continued parent involvement, and providing primary grade teachers with information on the practices of democratic education.

Each kindergarten should have a written transition plan that is developed jointly with a committee of teachers, staff, parents, and primary school educators.

Transition Plan

Kindergarten Staff Activities at the School, Local, and Regional Level

Some of the activities to consider include the following:

- Visiting staff in local and regional ministries of education who have authority over primary grades. Teachers discuss the philosophy and approach of their kindergarten and invite officials to visit the program. The same process can be used with local primary school principals and teachers of early grades.
- Convening a meeting between the primary and kindergarten staff to decide what information about children is appropriate to share between the programs. Determine how and when this sharing of information will occur.
- Visiting the primary classes the kindergarten children will attend to observe the various educational approaches used by the teachers. The staff ask many questions to clarify perceptions rather than make assumptions.
- Arranging for kindergarten children to visit their primary class for a few hours once or twice before the end of their last year in kindergarten.
- Meeting with all primary teachers in the area to discuss each child who will be going into those classes. Parents should be encouraged to attend. With parent permis-

sion, provide the first grade teachers with a copy of each child's most recent observational assessment. This will provide information about the values and goals of the kindergarten program as well as developmental data about the child.

- Inviting primary teachers and primary children to the kindergarten to talk to the kindergartners, who will enter primary school in the fall, and their parents about expectations and life in the primary grade.
- Holding a parent meeting towards the end of the year so that parents can discuss issues and ask questions about primary school.
- Having children draw a picture and write or dictate a note to their new teacher providing information about themselves, members of their family, and activities they enjoy.

Transition Planning Committee Activities At the City, Regional, or Country-wide Level

- Holding meetings and conferences and workshops to discuss effective transition strategies and partnerships between kindergartens and primary schools.
- Distributing materials, forms, reports, and agreements to teachers and administrators that various programs use to support effective transitions.
- Getting involved in efforts to develop and promote the use of democratic procedures in the primary curriculum. Offering to help provide training and technical assistance on these approaches.
- Inviting primary teachers, principals, and education officials throughout the country to attend conferences and meetings which address these issues.
- Suggesting and encouraging the formation of parent groups at primary schools.

Requirements and Expectations for Children

Many primary school systems have specific requirements or expectations about what children must be able to do when they enter the primary grade. These requirements place parents, teachers, and children under pressures which can have a negative impact on the kindergarten curriculum. Some teachers, administrators, and adults are compelled to teach specific skills without considering the child's developmental level, needs, learning style, or best practices for teaching young children. If the expectations placed on children are unrealistic, the teacher works towards changing them. Expectations should be broadly stated and placed in a developmentally appropriate context. For example, rather than stating that a child must be able to count to ten, the teacher states that a child will be able to count objects in the environment (the number of children playing in an activity center, or crackers for snacks) as high as she is able. In some cases, the teacher must include certain expectations because they give credibility and support for democratic practices. Examples of expectations include: children will be able to make effective choices of learning goals and activities; children will be able to negotiate effectively; and parents will be knowledgeable about their children's strengths, interests, and needs.

When children are moved from the kindergarten to a primary school (based on different goals, philosophy, and methods), the teacher is obligated not to transform the way she teaches to accommodate the next program. However, she should prepare the children for the new environment. One good way to do this is to play "new school" after the children have visited an actual primary classroom. Teachers can set up the dramatic play activity center as a typical primary classroom. The teachers can play the role of a primary teacher and place the children in rows. They practice sitting and listening, standing in line, raising hands, and working in small workbooks. Children will learn some of the new requirements in a fun way.

The weekly plan must be rigorous and provide many opportunities for children to deepen and broaden their knowledge and skills through play. Teachers should continually observe each child's abilities in all developmental areas, so that activities will be sufficiently challenging.

To help assure that children are prepared for primary school, the teacher should provide older and more developmentally mature children with learning materials that are appropriate to their higher level skills and competencies. Math skills are important in primary school. As part of math activities, therefore, the kindergarten classroom should have many games, die, objects and materials to count and sort, and numerals to manipulate. Other math activities may include counting the number of napkins needed at lunch and counting the days until an anticipated holiday. Teachers should play simple games with the children that involve counting, classifying, and computing to assist those who need help and challenge those who are more advanced. The teacher might also set up the dramatic play center as a store to create math experiences through stocking shelves, pricing, buying, selling, and making change.

Child-Centered Practice

Kris will enter the first grade in the fall. She visits the primary classroom and meets her teacher in May. A week later, her primary teacher visits Kris in her kindergarten classroom for two hours, playing with the children and reading them a book. In June, Kris's mother, kindergarten teacher, and primary teacher meet to discuss Kris's strengths and needs. They agree that the primary teacher will provide extra help in math and more opportunities to use manipulatives for counting. Kris's mother has several ideas for helping Kris with math during summer shopping trips. They also agree that Kris will go to a higher class during reading lessons because she is already reading at that level. Since Kris is worried that she will not have friends at the new school, the primary teacher gives her mother the name and addresses of other children who will be in her class. Kris's mother will contact their parents and arrange for the girls to play together.

PARENT PAGE

What is transition? In educational terms transition means the movement of your child from one learning environment to another. This movement can generate positive excitement in anticipation of the new experience, but it can also generate stress and anxiety. When there are minor differences between the old and the new programs, transition can be relatively easy. When there are major differences in philosophy, expectations, and involvement of families, the transition can be stressful for children and parents. The differences between the kindergarten program where children have choices, are encouraged to be actively involved in their learning, and where parents are always welcome *versus* the more traditional primary school where the teacher expects quiet and obedience and where parents are not a part of the learning team are enormous. But even when the differences are extreme, careful planning and preparation can help make the adjustment easier. You have an important role to play in working with both the kindergarten and the primary grade staff at the end of the kindergarten year.

You should feel free to:

- Discuss any concerns you have about the transition between kindergarten and the primary grade with your child's teacher or program director.
- Share concerns about your child's readiness for primary grade.
- Visit your child's primary grade and meet the principal and director. Tell them about your child and the kindergarten program.
- Learn about the expectations for primary grade. Talk with your child about the differences between kindergarten and primary grade.
- Help your child feel good about growing older and moving on to primary school. Let your child know that you will help with any adjustment from one school to the next.
- Request and attend parent meetings on transition.
- Ask the kindergarten director to invite the principals and teachers of the primary schools to visit the kindergarten.
- Join or start a parent group at the primary school. Discuss this idea with the principal of the new school.
- Consider giving an end of year report about your child's interests and developmental progress to the primary grade teacher and asking for a meeting between you, the kindergarten teacher, and the primary teacher.

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CONCLUSION

John Dewey, a progressive American educator wrote:

> "The great failings of our national and international society are due largely to breakdown in dialogue, to our inability to understand our different needs and conflicting aspirations . . . One's compassion and sensitivity toward another cannot be assured merely by the application of high moral standards: these qualities arise out of direct experience and the awareness which accompany common responsibilities" (Towbridge, 1965, p.11).

The philosophy and the examples of classrooms and practice that are discussed in this book are consistent with those presented by Dewey as he opened the first progressive school devoted to teaching democracy in the United States many years ago. Children educated in child-centered classrooms practice understanding themselves and each other.

Classrooms reflect the values and the culture of society. In open, democratic cultures classrooms should beckon children to participate actively in their own learning. Teachers and parents work together to create opportunities to empower children to meet the challenges that they must face everyday. They learn to weigh options and make choices, to care for themselves and for each other, to express their ideas and their feelings. Children in child-centered classrooms become life-long learners who pursue their interests with enthusiasm. They will be the stewards of a new world—hopefully a better, more compassionate world.

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GLOSSARY

Activity Centers—designated areas of the classroom where different materials are located and organized (art, sand and water, manipulatives).

Assessment—a method used to discover children's developmental levels in a standardized format using formal or informal procedures.

Child-Centered Classroom—a classroom where children construct their own knowledge through experiences and the teacher facilitates the learning process by building upon the children's interests, strengths, and needs.

Children's Resources International—a nonprofit organization located in Washington, D.C. that has funding from the Soros foundation to develop early childhood programs for countries in Eastern and Central Europe.

Comfort Habits—habits developed by young children which help them reduce stress or tension.

Curriculum—content areas of study and the materials and the activities planned to enhance learning in those areas.

Democracy—government by the people, exercised either directly or through elected representatives. All citizens share the primary source of power.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)—activities, materials, and teaching techniques used by or available to children so they are working at their developmental level. Practice that is age and individually appropriate for each child in the program.

Domains—areas of development which are all connected and related to one another (speech and language, social, emotional, cognitive, motive).

Empowerment—the act of investing or giving power to an individual or individuals.

Family Advisory Committee—a committee of elected parents from each classroom who meet with the staff to advise them on planning and implementing the program.

Home Visits—visits by the school staff to the children's homes to meet the family members and get to know the child in his home environment.

Individualizing—the act of considering children's differences in pace, style, and modality of learning. The process of making sure that each child's strengths are fully developed and that his weaknesses are strengthened.

Integrated Curriculum—activities planned for the classroom which include several different subject areas.

Multicultural Competence—the act of being knowledgeable and accepting of cultural practices which are unique to each child and family.

Open-Ended Materials—materials and toys that have more than one use or right answer and can be used differently by chidren of a variety of developmental levels.

Parallel Play—children who play next to each other and watch the others play, but do not play together.

Prop—materials or objects that assist children in their play (hats or costumes for dramatic play, signs for block play, and a shovel for sand and water play).

Redirection—a behavior management strategy which allows a child to get what she wants in an acceptable manner.

Self-Efficacy—the ability to be effective in the world, to get one's needs met in a positive way, and to know how to access one's resources (both internal and external).

Self-Initiative—the willingness to work and commit time and energy to an activity without being told to do it.

Step by Step Program—a program funded by the Open Society Institute to develop early childhood programs in nineteen Eastern and Central European Countries.

Transformation—the ability to determine the cause of a behavior and to begin the process of changing the behavior.

Publications by Children's Resources International

Creating Child-Centered Classrooms: 3–5 Year Olds—a curriculum and methods for teachers of children ages three to five

Creating Child-Centered Classrooms: 6–7 Year Olds—a curriculum and methods for teachers of children ages six and seven

Education and the Culture of Democracy: Early Childhood Practice—a book explaining the link between democracy and early childhood teaching

Early Childhood Faculty Seminar: Individualized Teaching—a university-level course designed for use by early childhood education faculty

Early Childhood Faculty Seminar: Learning Through Play—a university-level course outline designed for use by early childhood education faculty

Early Childhood Faculty Seminar: School and Family Partnerships—a university-level course designed for use by early childhood education faculty

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- OPPORTUNITY AND SELF-INITIATIVE
- FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND SPEECH
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- POWER VERSUS RESPECT
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